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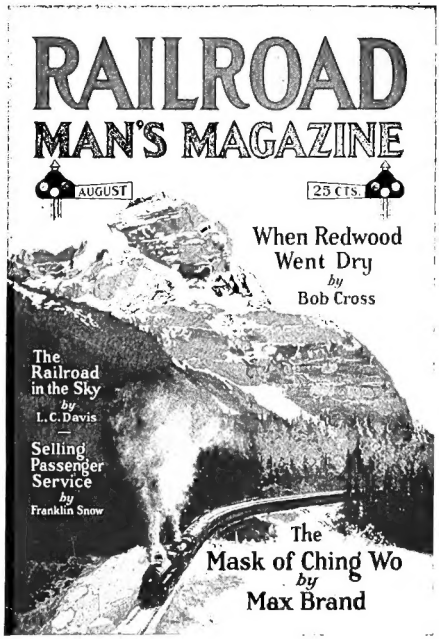

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The next issue of ALL-STORY on the stands September 3

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK,

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

C. T. DIXON, Vice-President

Published every other Wednesday and copyright, 1930, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies, 20 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Entered as second-class matter November 26, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain.

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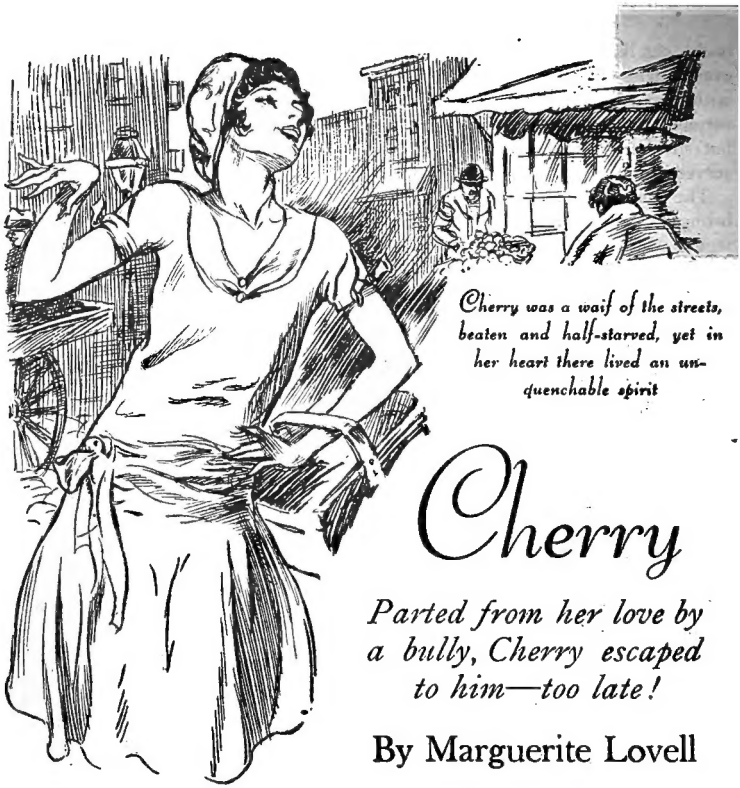


Cherry was a waif of the streets, beaten and half-starved, yet in her heart there lived an unquenchable spirit

Cherry

Parted from her love by a bully, Cherry escaped to him—too late!

By Marguerite Lovell

THE boyish interne came out of the public ward, his lips twitching with amusement. A little girl in there was entertaining the patients with imitations of hospital celebrities. She had a talent that was unique. The matron, with her deliberate walk suggestive of a slow motion picture; the popular head nurse herself; the doctors and their various oddities; all were mischievously "hit off." The interne was still chuckling over the impromptu show when he ran into Dr. Hugh Marlton in the corridor outside.

The great surgeon paused. "What's the joke?" he asked.

The interne's eyes twinkled. "If you come in, sir," he said, "you can see for yourself. There's a kid in the ward giving a priceless show."

A little curious, Marlton went with him to a spot where they could see without being seen. As luck would have it, the imitation going on at the moment was of no less a person than himself. A vivacious little girl of foreign appearance was mimicking his speed of movement—his progress down the wards, one arm behind his

back, was like a flash of lighting. She even burlesqued his bedside manner with comical fidelity. He could not remember having seen the child before, but she had certainly seen — and observed—him.

The interne was sorry he had brought the great man to look on. How would Marlton take this?

"I didn't know you were to be included in the program, sir," he apologized. "I hope you don't mind."

"Good heavens, no!" Marlton reassured him. "I'm amused. Who is she?"

"A little French girl called Cherry; we had her in the accident ward a while back. She was here only a week, but we had a lively time."

"So I'd imagine. Ask her to come and see me in my office, will you?"

He proceeded on his way while the interne went to deliver the message. Cherry, pulling a scarlet béret over her mop of dark curls, made a comical face of dismay.

"Oh, la! Am I to be scolded because I make all these sick peoples to laugh? Shall I be put to bed?"

"We haven't an empty one here," the interne said, smiling. "Dr. Marlton wants to speak to you, that's all."

So Cherry went alone into the little office, and while waiting she took off her shoes and began to rub her feet, which were very cold. There were holes in her stockings; Marlton saw them as he came in, before she had time to thrust her feet into her shoes again.

Cherry buttoned the straps and stood up. Although she was dressed shabbily in unbecoming, outgrown clothes, she was very unusual. She had a clear complexion, cherry lips and great eyes, dark and full of fire. She gave promise of definite beauty later on, and even now, possessed a quaint charm all her own.

Marlton's entrance did not disturb her in the least. She had her apology ready.

"In the house where I live we have no needles," she began, "so the holes come to stay."

"But you could buy them, surely?" Marlton responded. "Every one ought to be neat, you know."

She shook her curls.

"I have no money, monsieur, to buy mendings. I am in bondage—earning my hay. When I am twenty-one I become a great actress; even now, while I am washing plates, I study. As for my stockings, I will have one hundred pairs, and forty-fifty 'ats!"

Marlton smiled, and Cherry liked him on the spot. Before then she had thought he looked stern; but now she saw that he had kind eyes, of the blueness of a clear sky, nor was he nearly so old as she had supposed.

"I haven't a doubt of your success," he assured her. "You certainly proved your ability to act in the ward just now. It might pay the hospital to engage you as entertainer."

Cherry took him quite seriously.

"Whenever I am sent for, I shall oblige," she replied graciously. "For the sick, I always give my services; only from the theaters my fees will be as large as possible. It is not my intention to remain poor. To be poor is misery; to be rich is happiness. That I have discovered already." She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. To her dismay it said four, and she still had a lot of marketing to do.

She reached for the basket she had deposited on the floor.

"Oh, la, monsieur! The time passes. I must fly! If I am not back soon there will be trouble. I called to see

a sick womans, and I should not have lingered to amuse the getting-betters."

Marlton thought her quaint and attractive; he was loth to let her go.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I want you to tell me more about yourself, and—er—how it is you can imitate me so well. When have we met before?"

Her dark eyes laughed impishly.

"Frequently, monsieur, I have observed you from beneath the bedclothes. Often I have nearly suffocated before I could come up to breathe."

"What was the matter with you?"

She hesitated.

"It was an occasion last year when I tried to run away from the 'orrible bad mans where I work. I was knocked over by a car, and when I was recovered the devil came for me and I had to go." She clenched her little hands. "There is no escape from that villain. He is not only bad to myself; he makes his wife suffer also."

Marlton's sympathies were aroused.

"Tell me," he insisted, "why are you forced to work for such a man? Surely no one need be a slave in America?"

Cherry shook her head.

"He is my guardian, monsieur. Last spring we took a room in his house, my mother and I. She became ill, and die. There was much rent owing. Then Burney—that is the bad man's name—say I am to remain and work in the house; that I belong to him. Twice I have tried to run away, but always he find me and bring me back and beat me. So now I remain. It is my life."

"You poor child!" Marlton was touched. "I wish I could help you."

"NO one can help me, monsieur; but later on I shall help myself. Meantimes, I have a little saying when I am—what you call it?—with ze blues. It was the last speech my mother made before she die, and so I never forget. Listen, monsieur, perhaps sometime, if you are also in the blues, this will cheer you."

She folded her hands and closed her eyes; her long lashes, like painted fans, swept her cheeks. Slowly and reverently she recited the words:

"'*Courage, chérie, all troubles pass. The gray shadows they chase themselves across the clear sky for a purpose inscrutable. Then the sun shines. The good God smiles and all is well.*'"

She opened her eyes full upon him. "Are they not beautiful, monsieur?" she asked softly.

"Undoubtedly. I'd like to remember them."

"You are not happy always, *hein?* You have a great disappointment in your life?"

She was near enough to the truth to startle him. It appeared she was a mind reader, as well as an actress.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"I do not think; I know," she answered with grave conviction. "It come to me. It make me want to smooth your hair, if I could reach, and say cheer-ups."

He smiled a rather sad smile.

"Your wife is dead, perhaps?" she went on timidly.

A shade of reserve fell across the doctor's face.

"On the contrary, my wife is very well, I believe. She's not at home just now," he replied.

"Then maybe you are troubled about your childrens?" She tried another line. "No? You have none? That is a pity. For myself, I intend to have a great family, and adore them all."

"But you are only a little girl still."

Marlton patted Cherry's shoulder. He was promising himself not to lose sight of the child. He took out his billfold and pressed a bill into her small, cold hand.

"I mustn't keep you any longer," he said. "Buy yourself some new stockings with this, and some needles and darning thread, too."

Cherry gasped. Never in her life had she possessed more than a quarter at once, whereas this scrap of paper representing twenty whole dollars. *Twenty dollars!*

"Oh, monsieur!" she exclaimed. "How can I thank you? Now I can get some champagne for the poor sick woman to-day. They would not keep her where I live, because she cannot pay. This afternoon I asked what I could bring her, and the nurse say champagne if it could be afford. But, like myself, she have no friends in all the world."

Again Marlton was stirred. "You mustn't say that," he said. "You have one real friend now, Cherry. I'll give you a prescription for the wine, and here's my card." He took her hand, so small-boned that it was swallowed up in his big one. "Suppose you call at my house to-morrow at two? Can you come?"

"Oh, m'sieur, I will be on the doorstep without fail. Nothing could prevent."

He let her go, moved at the thought that the vast city would swallow this waif up and lose her to him temporarily.

"Then good-by until to-morrow," he said.

"Au revoir, m'sieur," she replied. "Please to forgive me for making a mock of you. Never will I do so again."

"Don't worry about that," he replied, grinning boyishly. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

II

A SERIOUS quarrel was going on at the house where Cherry lived. Rosa and Ted Burney were at it again. They quarreled violently and often; Rosa was nearly always in tears. She was not a bad sort. Cherry had received many a slap from her, but she could also be kind by fits and starts. The girl could forgive her much. It was Burney she detested so that sparks nearly came out of her eyes when she beheld him.

He was a brute and a bully, a huge fellow with the jowl of a prize fighter and the chest of a gorilla; most people gave him as wide a berth as possible, yet as a lady-killer he considered himself irresistible. He and his wife were usually "on the rocks." Originally a circus animal trainer and "strong man," he was only fitfully in employment now, varying the odd engagements he obtained in the summer with work as an extra in movie studios, so that he boasted of himself as a screen artist.

Rosa was also an old professional. They had met in a circus, when she had been engaged to Clarence, the clown.

Burney had swept her off her feet, but that was years ago, and since then she and he had jarred constantly.

To-night he had lounged into the kitchen like a bear with a sore head and demanded her ring to pawn. He wanted to buy a drink.

Rosa flatly refused.

"You'll take my finger off with it, that's all," she declared. "Clarence gave me that, and I'll never part with it! *You* never gave me a ring! Let go of my wrist, Ted; you're hurting!"

"Then don't rile me. Give me that ring!" he insisted brutally. "You can buy one that looks just the same in the five-and-ten. Don't you know better than to stand up to me?"

All that was left of spirit in her arose to defy him.

"Yes; but I don't care. I've been thinking a lot, sitting and thinking for days, and I'm through."

"Through?"

He held her wrist in a grasp that was agonizing.

She nodded. "I've come to my senses five years too late, that's all. Seen what a fool I was and what I gave up. I've never stopped being sorry!"

"Pity you can't go back to Clarence," he sneered. "Why not ask him? I wouldn't hold you back. I'd open the door."

"I don't doubt it. I've thought of it often, but it's too late now." There was hopelessness in her voice. "P'raps you'd be surprised to hear Clarence has married and is living in Freeport. I found it out when I was down there three days ago. I nearly ran into him and a girl with a baby carriage, coming out of a small house. Such a nice girl she was. And the house was so clean and neat, with a white door and window curtains and a brass knocker. I might have had all that, and—Clarence. They didn't see me. They were looking into each other's faces, and the baby was laughing up at them. That's what I missed—oh, heaven!—for you!"

Her lips quivered. Tears ran down and made furrows in her painted cheeks.

BURNEY stuck his hands into his pockets.

"Well, you can't say I didn't give you a good time while it lasted," he reminded her. "You've got a lot to be thankful for, meeting me. You've lived, haven't you?"

She hung her head.

"Yes—lived so that I'm afraid to die."

"You're melancholy mad to-night," he taunted her. "You'll feel better when you've had a drink. Give me that ring! It's a good one, at any rate. I'll get plenty on it!"

"Never!"

She put her hands behind her back.

Burney enjoyed a fight, especially with Rosa, because she always caved in in the end. But at that moment there came an interruption.

A door opened and shut quietly. He pricked up his ears.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Cherry, I suppose. She went out."

"Out? What for? I've told you to keep an eye on that little devil. She'll give us the slip some day, same as she's tried to before."

"It does the kid good to go out," said Rosa sulkily. "She's got to have a breath of fresh air."

Burney went to the door and shouted: "Here, Cherry, you! Come in!"

The girl entered and put her heavy basket down. The champagne was in there; Burney saw the necks of the bottles sticking out.

"What's that you've got? Booze?" he growled.

Cherry stood her ground. She had hoped to slip upstairs unheard and take the wine to the hospital to-morrow. Burney must not know what she had.

"Ginger ale," she prevaricated, but her eyes fell. It was impossible for Cherry to lie convincingly. Burney was suspicious at once.

"Well, stick 'em on the table," he

directed. "Come on, now; no nonsense!"

She was cornered. Her breath came short and fast. She pounced on her purchase and made a dart for the door; but Burney, like a good many heavy animals, could also move quickly. He strode after her and dragged her back, wrenching the champagne from her.

"Fizz!" He smacked his lips. "Well, I'll be—jiggered! Here, hold off!"

CHERRY was beside herself. She had become a fighting tiger cub, a fury with whirling legs and arms, but she might as well have tried to do battle with Goliath.

Grinning tolerantly—for the prospect of two whole bottles of champagne had changed his unpleasant mood—Burney picked her up under one arm, carried her, still struggling and fighting, upstairs, kicked open the door of her room and deposited her on her bed.

"Good night, Cherry," he taunted. "We'll drink your health downstairs. Better lock you in for safety, though."

Cherry was sobbing now.

"Oh, I beseech you," she cried piteously, "do not drink it all! It is for Madame Stewart in the hospital! I purchased it with gift money of my own. *Villain* that you are, you would not drink the medicine of a dying woman?"

Burney had no scruples of that sort.

"Medicine, no. Rather not! Champagne, yes—all the time," he replied.

She gathered herself together for a final effort.

"Then, I swear to you," she declared, lifting a shaking little hand ceilingward, "that I will be avenged. I will wait behind the door with a bottle and break it on your head."

"Break away." He shrugged his enormous shoulders. "Meanwhile, better simmer down. You'll have a fit if you keep up them fireworks. Happy dreams, Cherry. Put a bit more polish on my shoes in the morning."

His heavy footsteps receded downstairs.

Panting and exhausted, Cherry sobbed into her pillow until, finally, emotion wore itself out and only dry, tearless gasps escaped her.

She had wept herself almost into a stupor when a furry body bounded lightly from the window sill and nestled, purring loudly, beneath her chin. It was Mee-wee, the little half-starved cat she had smuggled into the house last week.

Cherry cuddled the small creature close to her. The warm contact of the soft body afforded her an unspeakable comfort. It was good to be loved, even by a stray cat, in this hateful house where no one else cared at all.

III

SOME time during the night Cherry awoke to find Rosa standing by her, her face ghost white, her eyes haunted. There were livid bruises across her temple and on her arms.

She came and sat on the bed edge and reached for Cherry's hand.

"Poor kid! We've led you a life—him and I. I'm sorry. I haven't meant to be unkind, really. You know that, don't you? You're an understanding little soul. You deserve a better home than this."

Cherry gave her hand a little squeeze. She could forgive Rosa always.

"Poor madame! You are so troubled!"

The woman's lips trembled.

"Troubled's not the word, Cherry. I'm—done. I've nothing to live for.

I've been realizing it lately, looking at myself in the glass and seeing myself as if I was a stranger. Thirty-two, and finished. 'I was young once and I loved a man'—same old story, same old finish in the end. Lord! Why am I talking like this? I came in to tell you the poor thing in hospital died late this evening. I had to go there and answer some questions. She's out of her troubles now."

Tears came to Cherry's eyes. She had not known the dead woman very well, but she had been drawn to her because they were both so friendless.

Rosa, still stroking her hand, changed the subject. "You'll have to bustle about in the morning. There'll be lots to do, and I shan't be around."

"Do you not wish to be disturbed?" Cherry asked.

"No. Well, I won't stay now. Think of Rosa sometimes, won't you?"

She stood in the doorway, looking strange. Then she came back, pausing at the foot of the bed. "Cherry, I'm older than you—years; but we're both women, and you'll go through it same as me. I mean, love'll come to you—experience—temptation. That's what I want to say. It's the way we're made, I suppose, that we don't value what we've got until we lose it. People especially. What I'm trying to say amounts to this: if you get a good man's love in your life, never let go of it. It's the loveliest thing you'll ever have, and all the rest's a sham. Oh, Cherry, what a fool I've been! Not valuing what I had—a man—so good to me, who would have been true and kind always. And I threw it all away. You remember that, if you're ever in the same kind of danger. Think of Rosa—done for at thirty-two, when she might have been a different woman." She fumbled at her dress.

"Here's some more advice I'm going to give you," she went on. "I'm full of it to-night. You've tried to run away twice. Well, watch and wait for an opportunity and try it the third time. You might be lucky. That's my last word. I'm really going now. So long, Cherry. Think I'll give you a kiss, if you don't mind."

Cherry lifted her face and the woman's rouged lips touched her forehead. It was the first caress the girl had known since her mother died. She held out her arms, too.

"Perhaps you will be happy by and by," she whispered consolingly. "I myself have never yet despaired, except to-night, when I was too overcome to look for my star. There it is now. Behold it! It twinkle. It smile. It say cheer-ups. We all have our star to say that."

Rosa looked out through the uncurtained window.

"I'll find mine at the bottom of the river, I expect," she said.

IV

CHERRY awoke in the morning in a more tranquil mood. She had been too late with her champagne, so what matter that Burney had consumed it? She only hoped it had given him a bad headache.

She slipped out early to buy a few flowers with the change left from Marlton's bill, and took them to the hospital. Then she came back and set about her household tasks.

Rosa's nonappearance was not unusual; she often stayed in bed the whole morning. Burney would probably rise about noon, go out for a drink, and come back for lunch.

Cherry scoured and cleaned with a will. She had a friend now, a great and kind-hearted friend to whom she

was already very much attached, and whom she was looking forward to seeing again that day.

She thought about Marlton on and off the whole morning; so the hours slipped by and she never noticed that Rosa had not come down. At ten o'clock she placed a tray with breakfast on it outside the door; Burney had taken it in and consumed it instead of Rosa.

"You must let me help you," he told her. She shook her head. "No one can help me, monsieur. It is hopeless"

His wife had gone out, saying she'd never be back, but he knew better. She was always threatening desperate measures, but she'd hang on, all the same.

It was the clinging quality about all women that irritated him so. The only female who did not have it was that spitfire kid, Cherry. How she'd stood up to him in that tussle over the champagne! By gum, she'd almost fizzled with rage!

It occurred to him now that Cherry might be made more use of than as a servant, though exactly how he had not decided. She had a way with her, it seemed.

He must take more stock of the kid. It might even be a good idea to send her to Madame Lenane, who trained child artistes for the stage.

THE notion of turning Cherry into some kind of investment remained with him all day. The kid was as good as his own adopted daughter; he could do as he liked with her; he owned her. This wasn't actually true, but he had dinned it into her head so often that he had almost come to believe it himself.

Returning about half past one, in fairly good humor, because he had met a man who had treated him, he found Cherry had prepared a meal, but was nowhere in evidence herself.

She kept him waiting at least five minutes before she came down, and then, to his surprise, he saw that in some mysterious way or other, known only to a daughter of Eve, she had achieved a miracle with her appearance, looking nearly her age, for once, and as pretty as a peach.

A peach described her. She wore a frock that matched her name, and her cheeks, crimson with excitement at the prospect of seeing Marlton again, accorded with her frock, too. The frock itself had belonged to her mother, and Cherry had adapted it according to her notions of modern fashions.

The result was effective, though insecure. Possessing no sewing materials, she had achieved it entirely with the aid of a packet of pins.

"Been dollin' yourself up?" he sneered. "Goin' to the Ritz, I suppose? Well, hurry up and let's have lunch. You can take my shoes off first. They're tight."

He stuck out his big feet, barring her way. Cherry stepped over them disdainfully, with her chin in the air.

"I'm waiting." Burney was watching her out of his piglike little eyes. "Did you hear me say take off my shoes?"

"I heard, but I do not choose to obey." Cherry felt she could defy this dreaded bully to-day. She had two friends on her side now—Marlton and Rosa.

Burney consumed his meal with speed, and then, pushing his plate away, leaned across the table toward her as she removed the dishes.

"So you're not goin' to obey?" he opened fire again. "You ought to know by now that what I say goes. You're getting too old to spank. I wonder how you'd like to be kissed instead, by a fine, big chap like me, that could pick you up in one hand and make a meal of you in one bite? P'raps you'd rather take my shoes off, after all."

CHERRY dodged past him. She wanted her coat, which was hanging behind the door.

"Don't delay me. I have an important rendezvous," she cried.

He pushed back his chair and strode toward her.

"A rendezvous? That's French for a date, ain't it? You can't go out as you please. You're getting too fresh. I didn't guess you'd started that game, picking men up in the street."

Cherry stamped her foot.

"I have one friend only," she declared. "And I did not find him in the street. He is a great man, a doctor in the hospital. It was he who gave me the champagne. It is I who must express my thanks to-day, even though a pig has consumed it."

"Oh, I'm a pig, am I? That's a love word in French, I suppose," Burney teased her; "like cabbage and cau-

liflower, and all sorts of vegetables. Well, I don't mind. You can call me anything you like. I'm goin' to have a kiss to top off my meal with. Your precious doctor can wait."

He placed his arm around her, but he might as well have attempted to embrace an electric fan in action.

Cherry spun round, furious. To be beaten by Burney was one thing, she could survive it; but to be caressed by him was infinitely worse.

"*Dog!* Let go of me!" she cried.

Fortunately for Cherry, the method she had employed in remodeling her frock succeeded in liberating her where alone she would have stood very little chance. She was fairly bristling with pins, and in the struggle Burney got scratched. His grasp loosened.

"You little hedgehog!" he accused her. "You've drawn blood!"

Cherry was almost dancing with rage. The precious minutes were passing. It was unthinkable that she should keep her friend waiting.

She flung on her coat.

"I go! Detain me at your peril!" she defied him.

Burney put his back against the door. The scratch had quelled his immediate desire to kiss her. Besides, he couldn't cuddle her comfortably while she was a mass of pins.

"We'll see," he tantalized. "You've got to tell me more about this wonderful pal of yours first. I bet it's all a fairy tale. Let's have his name first. Come on. Out with it!"

Cherry faced him with mutiny in her soul.

"I will not tell you," she replied.

Burney still leaned against the door, barring her way. She was helpless against his brute strength.

"That's as far as I'll let you go until you've told me," he said derisively. "Hello, more fireworks? What's the use of ranting and raving? Ain't you ever heard a clock strike before?"

Cherry was beside herself now.

"At two o'clock I promised to be on the step," she cried wildly. "Cannot you understand I shall be late?"

"Not a bit of it." Burney was enjoying the scene. "You won't be late, because you'll never get there."

He folded his arms. It was as good as a play to witness Cherry's fury, her tears, her worse than disappointment.

As the man watched her, his expression gradually changed from cruel amusement to alert interest.

Suddenly he conceived a brilliant idea, a vision of what she might do in a field where the prizes are often huge. She had "the goods." She could deliver them at Hollywood—or right here in New York.

"By Jee-upiter! It's only just struck me!" he cried. "You can stop registering all that sob-stuff until it's time to shoot it. I'm taking you down for a mike test to Roe Green, right away! You're goin' to make my fortune—in the movies!"

V

MRS. KENTON, Hugh Marlton's only sister, was having lunch with him on Tuesday. Whenever his wife was away she made a habit of dropping in to keep him company, because she knew that he was lonely. If Wanda was at home she studiously avoided their house. A devoted wife herself as well as an affectionate sister, she resented Wanda's selfishness and indifference to her husband. It was tantamount to desertion in her eyes, and she never could understand why her brother put up with it.

She taxed him with that more directly to-day than ever before.

"When's Wanda coming home?" she inquired.

"Next week, I believe, for a few days," Marlton told her. "After that she's off to Egypt with the Torrances."

"The Torrances?" Dorothy's tone was faintly critical. "I should hardly have thought them the sort of people you'd approve of as companions for your wife, Hugh. They're rather impossible, you know. Can't you do anything? You puzzle me about Wanda. You're not a weak character. You're a strong one; and yet you let your wife do what she likes. Don't you care?"

Marlton extinguished his cigarette in his saucer.

"Care?" he replied. "Not so much now. As for controlling Wanda, no man could unless he physically ill used her. I can't see myself doing that. She's incapable of responding to moral suasion. Wanda is Wanda, and when you've said that, you've said all."

Dorothy stirred her coffee thoughtfully. She was very fond of her brother. She had always been in his confidence until his marriage three years ago.

She stretched out a slim hand across the table and laid it over his.

"Why don't you talk to me openly, Hugh? You can trust me," she said.

Marlton glanced at the clock. He had often been on the verge of breaking down the barriers of reserve with this warm-hearted sister of his; only a chivalrous loyalty toward the careless creature who was his wife had restrained him.

"I'd like to," he answered, "but there isn't time. It's a long story, and I've an appointment at two."

"A patient?"

"No. A little girl. I'll tell you about her, if you like."

"Tell me about Wanda first. There's twenty minutes." Dorothy pushed back her chair, getting up, and dropped into a more comfortable one.

"Nothing's right, is it?" she went on. "I mean, your whole marriage is a disappointment. I guessed that long ago."

Marlton nodded.

"Just a mistake," he said. "If I hadn't made it some one else would. She's one of those women who are unalterable. What she wants she gets. She is not to be controlled or reasoned with; her mental outlook is that of a white savage. There are such people, you know. She'd make a good study for a novelist."

"I do wish you were free." Dorothy poke beneath her breath. "Why can't you be? Hasn't she given you cause?"

"Not that I know of." He lit another cigarette. "I think she's very comfortable for the present, thank you; and if she isn't she's fairly sure to let me know. I'm all right." He smiled reassuringly at her. "Don't worry about me. I've got my work, you see. It keeps me from thinking—or doing things I shouldn't. You mustn't pity me too much, my dear."

"But I do." Dorothy tapped a neatly shod little foot impatiently on the parquet floor. "You're lonely, and I know it. You're working yourself to death and you've no one to look after you properly. I hate to think about it. Wanda's so dreadfully unworthy of you. I know she must have got hold of you somehow. No one ever knew how you met."

MARLTON recollected well enough.

"She was staying at the Curzon Hotel. She fancied she was ill and sent for me. She told me afterward she'd seen me lunching there with you,

found out who I was, and brought about the rest in the most direct way she could think of. She explained as soon as we were married that she'd simply had to find a rich husband. She'd started off with ten thousand dollars and a house left her by her father when he died. She sold the house and spent the money in Monte Carlo having a good time. Then she came home, broke. She hadn't enough left to settle her bill at the hotel. I fell in love with her directly, of course."

"Naturally," Dorothy concurred. "She could get almost any man she wanted. Even Billy says she's fascinating, although he doesn't like her. But why didn't you try to make her settle down? She spends your money like water; she's all over the place, making dubious friends. After all, she owes you everything she has. Have you ever tried to talk to her, Hugh?"

"Yes; twice. The first time was on our honeymoon, and she flew into a violent rage and threw a bottle of pickles all over me. They're not very tidy as a missile," Marlton recollected, with a wry smile. "The second occasion was over some bills. I gave her a check for several thousands to pay for some furniture, and she spent the whole amount on clothes. I was rather put out, but she went one better and tore all the pictures off the walls and smashed the glasses. I can't stand scenes, so I resolved that the only thing to do was to allow her all the freedom and money she demanded—peace at any price. We understand each other remarkably well now." He got up. "Well, now you know the story, do you feel any better?"

"Worse!" Dorothy was biting her lips. She wanted to cry. Hugh deserved so much more of life than this. He was so good, so fine, such a dear! "To think that's—your marriage! Your life! Oh, Hugh!"

She clenched her pink-tipped hands.

"Not altogether my life," he corrected her. "My work counts for a tremendous lot. It brings me into contact with all sorts of interesting characters. Which reminds me, I've just time to tell you about the child I'm expecting at two. Sybil Thorndyke's a great friend of yours, isn't she? I wish you'd ask her what she would advise for the education of a young actress—a good school or an individual teacher?"

Dorothy opened her eyes.

"I will. But why? What are you going to do now?" she asked.

He told her about his meeting with Cherry. "She's a born actress," he finished, "almost a genius. And there's something extraordinarily lovable about her besides. Stay and see her for yourself. You're bound to be interested."

"I'm interested now. I'll wait. What time did you say she's coming?" Dorothy asked.

"Two o'clock."

"It's five past. What made you ask her?"

MARLTON paused a moment.

"I can't quite tell. She moved me. Partly because she's a child, I suppose; and partly because she's not happy. My idea was to find out if I could get her away from these people and help her realize her ambition."

Dorothy was considering.

"I'll help you," she volunteered. "I'll ask Sybil lots of questions and later on we can do more perhaps, if she proves as worth it as you seem to think. It's ten past two now. She's evidently not very punctual."

"She must have been kept. She said

she'd be here without fail, and she's the sort of little person who would keep her word." He spoke with conviction. "I've some letters to get off. Can you amuse yourself?"

"Of course. If the child turns up, shall I send for you?"

"No; I'll be back soon. Make friends with her yourself."

Marlton left the room. It was after three when he rejoined his sister and found her still alone, a trifle bored with waiting, too.

"Your little Bernhardt hasn't arrived," she said. "I don't think she can be coming, after all. Why, how disappointed you look! She *is* only a little girl, isn't she?"

Marlton had crossed to the window and was looking out. It occurred to him that Cherry might have been seized with an attack of shyness, and was lingering in the street, afraid to come in. But the pavement was deserted. No foreign-looking child with abbreviated skirts and a scarlet béret was anywhere in sight.

He turned away with a sigh.

"Yes, only a little girl," he answered. "But I *am* disappointed, all the same."

Dorothy picked up her bag and gloves. She kissed him affectionately.

"Well, I hope she'll come. You must tell me if she does," she said. "Oh, how I wish you had a nice wife, Hugh! Let me know when Wanda's been and gone, and come and dine with us soon. I *do* worry about you, old boy. I can't help it."

"Don't, then." Marlton's habitual mask of reserve was on again. "I assure you, there's not the least need to pity me."

"Well, good-by, dear." She waved to him from the door.

The doctor's smile faded as the door closed, and his face fell into graver lines again. Not that Wanda was in his thoughts. His mind was filled with regret because his little new acquaintance had failed to turn up. He recalled her last words, the ring of pleasure in them:

"Oh, m'sieur, I will be on the doorstep without fail. Nothing could prevent."

Something had prevented, evidently —an accident or force. And all he knew was a name! Cherry—Chérie! Yet, even if he never saw her again, he felt her charm would linger with him many a long day.

VI

IT was useless for Cherry to argue or plead, once Burney had made up his mind. To Roe Green she should go; and the director might be induced to put her through a test then and there. If Cherry had a spark of anything in her, he'd spot it at once.

"What's this doctor guy like you're so set on seeing?" he interrupted her impassioned entreaty. "A young chap, I suppose, with soft white hands and wavy hair? One of them students walking the hospitals, eh? You mustn't fall in love at your age. Now, dry up and wash your face."

Cherry's tears scorched on her hot cheeks as they fell.

"I will not wash my face. I will not become cool," she stormed. "You make accusations that are wicked. My friend is a great man. He is so clever that he could cut you up in many pieces and put you together again, which would not be worth while. Perhaps he will even help me to escape from you."

"I'd like to see him try," Burney scowled. "Haven't I told you often enough that you're my ward? Any one who tries to take you away from me

will catch it. That's the law. Now, will you go and wash your face?"

Cherry stood her ground, defying him.

"I never forget a good face or a kindness in all my life," she declared. "And that is why I shall remember

precious time. If you won't wash yourself I must do it for you, that's all."

THEREUPON he picked her up and carried her to the sink.

"There, that's better." He tilted her woebegone little face up and

Cherry went through her part with grace and ease. She was in her natural element at last

him always. But if I escape from you I'd forget you as soon as I turned round."

Burney frowned.

"That's meant for more sauce, I suppose," he said. "Well, we won't argue any longer. We're wasting

dried it thoroughly. "Now, you want a dust of powder and some lip stick and you'll do. We'll get that from Rosa's room."

He pulled her into Rosa's bedroom, toward the dressing table, where was an untidy litter of grease paints and

the like. The effect when he had finished was certainly striking.

"That's what you want. Color. Lots of it," he pronounced. "Look in the glass. You could pass for a beauty now, with a shove."

Cherry looked, and saw red in every sense of the word.

"I refuse to walk in the street like this," she rebelled. "It is an outrage."

Burney took the pot of cold cream, with which she was about to remove the make-up, forcibly from her.

"You'll be seen as you are, because I say so," he decreed. "What's more, in your case art's a great improvement on nature, I can tell you. Now, come along. We'll take a taxi to the station, because I don't want you running away in the street. You're a bagful of tricks. I know that."

Cherry saw the futility of struggling any further. Her heart felt bursting. Marlton would never, never know how miserable she was because she had failed to keep her appointment. He would consider her an *ingrate* without manners or appreciation of the honor he had done her.

She raised her smoldering eyes to Burney's purple countenance. How could she endure his society for four and a half more years?

"Please to remove your hand from my wrist," she told him. "It is too late now to see my friend."

He could not guess what was in her mind, but he could see that her fit of rebellion was over.

"Ready?" he asked.

"In one moment."

Cherry filled a saucer with milk and set it on the kitchen floor for Mee-wee, stooping to drop a parting kiss on the little animal's soft head.

Burney regarded her with impatience.

"You're spoiling that blamed animal until it 'll be too fat and lazy to catch mice," he remarked. "If I see you give it another drop of milk I'll turn it out. Now, come along, Miss Nazimova. We've wasted enough time as it is."

Seizing her arm, he dragged her out.

VII

THE film studios of Artists United Pictures at Roe Green, Long Island, are the best equipped in the East, as Burney was at pains to impress upon Cherry. He expatiated on their floor space and many resources, but the girl's imagination was not fired when she saw them. Everybody seemed to be wandering about in a desultory kind of way. Powerful arc lights nearly blinded her, and electric cables lay like snakes about the floor. Carpenters, whistling and shouting, were busy working and hammering, building up new sets. In other parts, on sound-proof stages, scenes were being interminably rehearsed before they were finally "shot."

Here and there Burney pointed out stars of different magnitude and of various nationalities.

He was at home here. Now and then actors and actresses, their faces made up a ghastly mauve, came and spoke to him. He liked that. It would help Cherry to realize he was a screen actor of importance.

One woman sauntered nonchalantly up to him — a tow-haired, vampish-looking creature, wearing a sequin dress cut down to the waist in back, a huge powder puff in her hand.

"Hello, Lil! You on?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Yes—cabaret scene. It's great. We're all supposed to be properly plastered in this scene. Wish it was true!"

She giggled, and handed him her powder puff. "Here, shake this over my back, will you? I've got a solo dance to do in half a yard of black lace. That's the stuff to knock 'em."

"That's the stuff," Burney agreed, adding importantly: "I'll come and look on by and by. I want to watch Von Stamp at work. One of these days I'll start directing myself."

Just then the lightly dressed lady observed Cherry. Burney introduced her with a wave of the hand.

"My adopted kid," he said. "I'm waiting for Fitch to give her a test. She's cut out for the screen, in my opinion."

The woman favored Cherry with a curious stare.

"Is that so? Let's hope she pulls it off. It's all a life," she remarked. "I'd take her to Hollywood if she was mine."

"Dare say I shall. She can shape up here a bit first, though," Burney replied.

Cherry decided it was time to assert herself. She had been making up her mind that screen acting was not her line.

"Myself, I think I may detest this work," she pronounced. "And if so, then I shall refuse."

"Oh, no, you won't." Burney turned upon her. "You'll take what's offered—and be thankful for a start. Why, you don't realize how many girls would give their eyes to walk right in here, same as you have with me! Hundreds of 'em!"

"That's right," the scantily dressed lady nodded. "You're lucky to have a chance. I had to wait for weeks and months—couldn't get a look in for a year. Well, so long, Ted."

She hurried away as Von Stamp, on the floor for the cabaret scene, began shouting to his crowd to take their places.

CHERRY'S passions of the night before and the afternoon had worn her out.

"How long must we remain?" she asked wearily.

"Remain? Why, we've only just come," Burney answered. "There's Fitch." He started forward as a youngish man walked briskly in their direction.

Burney seized his chance.

"I say, Fitch, can you give my little girl a test?"

"Sorry, Ted. Not a minute to-day. Come over to-morrow, ten o'clock sharp." He paused, faintly interested in Cherry. "Keen on the work, kid?" he asked kindly.

She shook her head. There was something about Fitch that was real and sincere.

"I do not think so. But drama, yes—on the stage," she replied. "But here—what is there to create? I should become distracted. Why should not the actions be natural, as we would make them ourselves?"

"Your voice is all right," the director remarked, more interested in the quality of that than in her words. "Suits your looks, too. Can you sing?"

"A little," said Cherry.

"What's that? What's that?" put in Burney, nudging her. "Mr. Fitch, she can sing like a bird!"

"Well, we'll have a try-out to-morrow. Can't stop now."

He patted her shoulder and hurried off.

"You must always tell 'em you can do everything," Burney said to her. "Bluff it out! Let's go over to Von Stamp. Watch your step. Mind the cables."

They picked their way across the vast floor, pausing before the glittering cabaret set.

Something had gone wrong. Von Stamp, a gross-looking man with cropped hair and pendulous lower lip, was being voluble in German. All his crowd were standing, sitting or lolling about, looking blank.

The actress Burney had been talking to beckoned to him.

"What's up, Lil?" he asked.

"Can't shoot to-day," she answered. "The girl who was to have been carried on in an Easter egg hasn't turned up."

"Can't some one oblige?"

"Not likely! We draw the line at no clothes at all," she bridled. "The egg was specially made, too. Your kid would fit in, but none of us. The question is, would she do it, and has she got a figure?"

Into Burney's eyes there came a sudden gleam. Here was something better than waiting for Fitch to give Cherry a test. To fill a gap like this meant money down, that very day.

"Of course she will," he answered. "She'll have to, if I say so."

"Well, then, go and speak to Stamp—if he'll give you a chance."

"A chance? Watch me!" Burney replied confidently, and skirted the set toward the perturbed director.

VIII

"BUT how can I portray a rôle before I study it?" Cherry inquired. "I must know more."

"You don't need to know more," Burney laid down the law. "The director will tell you all that's necessary. I'm to take you to the dressing rooms now. Every one's waiting, so hurry up!"

He piloted her as far as the ladies' dressing rooms, where he handed her over to one of the women, after he had given her Herr Von Stamp's instructions.

"I'll wait for her in the hall," he concluded. "Be quick."

"Take off your things, my dear," the woman said.

Obediently Cherry slipped out of her frock.

The dresser held out her hand.

"I must have the slip, too, and everything else, deary, or you can't get these on," she explained, producing a pair of small-sized pink silk tights.

Cherry had not yet grasped what was expected of her.

"Into these?" she echoed blankly. "But what else?"

"Wait till you've got these on and see how nice you look. They've got to be perfect, without a wrinkle anywhere."

Getting into tights, although one may be slim and small, is not a facile process. It takes time and much patience, but finally it was done.

"That's grand! You fit them a treat." The dresser stood back, surveying the effect. There was no mistaking the exquisiteness of Cherry's form. The childish shapelessness of her garments hitherto had disguised the fact that she was a very lovely girl, on the borders of womanhood.

She cast a startled glance at herself and grew pink.

"Now please to give me the skirt and bodice," she requested.

"There's no skirt, my dear." The woman draped a yard of translucent tulle tightly around Cherry's waist. "Now you're finished. You'll photograph just like a living statue. There now! I shouldn't get so excited about it. No one thinks anything of wearing little or nothing in the pictures.

Besides, you've got a lovely figure. Now let me fix your hair."

Cherry wrenched the comb from her hand and threw it away. She snatched a dressing gown from the nearest hook and wrapped it around her. Then, like a small whirlwind, she burst out of the room, cannoning into Burney in the passage. He spun round.

"Hello! Got 'em again?" he inquired. "You'll blow yourself up one of these days. What's wrong now?"

Cherry stamped her foot.

"Listen!" she cried. "Do you suppose I shall consent to be photographed without a skirt? It is an outrage! I die with shame!"

"You'll die of rage, most likely." Burney took her by the shoulders and thrust her back into the dresser's arms. "Here, ma'am, look after my kid," he said. "Don't let her go until I've brought Herr Von Stamp. We'll see what he's got to say to this. He's directed wild cats, so perhaps he'll know what to do with Cherry here."

The girl only wound the dressing gown more tightly round her.

"He will do nothing at all with me," she cried. "Unless a skirt to me is given I shall not stir!"

Burney scowled.

"You'll stir all right. You're creating a lot of noise about nothing," he said and stamped away.

The dresser was a kindly woman. She felt sorry for Cherry herself.

"You mustn't carry on so, dearie," she soothed. "In pictures, you've got to take what comes. If I was you I'd do what's asked of me, because your pa don't look as if he'll stand for very much."

Cherry began to weep.

"He is not my father. He is *un goujat*, whom I detest," she railed.

Without knocking, Burney came back into the room and caught the tail end of her sentence. He had two other men with him.

"Who's that you're calling a jujube? Me, I suppose," Burney presumed. "Well, here's Herr Von Stamp and Mr. Davey come to tell you to be a sensible girl. Let's have this off."

He caught her by the shoulders.

In the presence of his two superiors the fellow feigned a joviality he was far from feeling. If he had had Cherry alone he would have beaten her soundly.

She flung away from him.

"Paws off! I forbid you!" she cried in desperation.

Even the dresser, accustomed as she was to actresses in all sorts of tantrums, felt called upon to range herself on Cherry's side now. She stood protectingly in front of the girl, but Burney brushed her aside.

"We'll have this off," he repeated brutally, and wrenched the dressing gown from Cherry's shoulders. There was the sound of rending cotton as he tore the garment out of her clenched hands.

She gave one shuddering breath and then stood as though frozen into stone. The cry that had risen to her lips died back into her throat. She could not speak. She was unable to move, engulfed by shame.

Then Burney turned to the others with the flourish of a showman, the proud air of the vendor of a lovely slave in the market-place.

"How's that for a figger, boys?" he said.

FOR about three seconds there was complete silence. Von Stamp's bulbous eyes glistened. He went up to Cherry and laid a conciliatory hand on her curly head.

"*Liebchen,* you are marvelous," he said.

"Marvelous!" echoed John Davey, who owned the company.

Burney was fully observant of the effect his ward created.

"Do you hear that, kid?" he cried. "Here are these gentlemen saying how nice you look, and you're making a song about a skirt that isn't included in your wardrobe! You've got to be sensible now and please us all. Why, just think of the chance you're getting!"

He clapped his hand on Cherry's shoulder. "This picture is supposed to be laid in France," he went on, "and you're only asked to act what you are—a French bit of fluff hopping in and out of an egg, looking saucy—a surprise in a supper scene. It won't take ten seconds."

Cherry had somehow possessed herself of the dressing gown again, and her powers of speech, never absent for long, had come back.

"Give to me a skirt and I will do my best," she reiterated.

Von Stamp and Davey measured glances; the latter nodded. "She'd look just as well," he said thoughtfully. Then the German director addressed Cherry with a benevolent smile.

"A skirt, *liebchen?* If you will not appear without one, what can I do? I must give way." He leaned nearer and whispered in her ear: "I would do much more than that to please you. We must be friends. You understand?"

IX

CHERRY looked sweet in the Columbine get-up which the dresser brought from the costume room. Even Burney could find no fault with her.

"You'll do," he said curtly. "When the shots are over you'd better thank Herr Von Stamp prettily for giving in to you the way he did. And no more scenes, remember! Come along now, and mind you behave!"

Without further ado he led her on to the set, where Von Stamp was grouping his extras. The magnificence of the cabaret was dazzling. Thousands had been squandered in its building up. Now cascades of blinding lights were showered upon it. In one corner, on a raised, flower-decked stand, a string band was tuning up in readiness for the dancers.

The director glanced at Cherry, and a peculiar gleam came into his eyes.

Alfred Fitch—doing nothing but stand by for the moment, because his leading man had suddenly deserted—saw that look and translated it correctly. So did John Davey, standing by his side. He whispered: "I say, Fitch, Von Stamp's sweet on that little girl. Watch him tucking her into that egg!"

Fitch lingered, curious to see how Cherry shaped.

The papier-mâché egg into which Von Stamp had handed her was placed in a gigantic flower-decked basket with a futuristic chicken on top.

The director stepped back, and commenced directing again.

The conductor of the string band was instructed to walk and bow his way across the floor, until finally his deportment satisfied the German. After that a troupe of dancers tripped down a circular stairway with a flash of sequined skirts and a whirl of shapely limbs.

Then the woman called Lil flung off her scanty dress and went through her vampire dance. She had rehearsed until she was ready to drop, but she was technically perfect now.

All this was mere preparation for the entrance of the star, Marian King-King, a vision of polished loveliness, who drifted on to the set with an air of self-conscious complacency.

Von Stamp lifted the megaphone to his mouth.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, take your positions. Fill up your glasses. Dancing partners, please to take the floor, but leave the center space for Miss King and Mr. Lennard. Music—all ready. A waltz, soft, slow—swell up—crescendo!—*mein Gott,* must I be a band conductor also? Now, Miss King, if you will be so good, relax. Ready once more. Silence, everybody! Music, begin! Camera—go!"

The camera clicked. The scene was shot. The lights went out.

VON STAMP blew on his whistle once more, and the lights were turned on in a blinding torrent.

"Now for the egg!" he called. "Handle the basket carefully, boys. Remember, you're not carrying coal! Now the little girl comes out. Here, *liebchen,* step out daintily, like a fairy. Hands a little higher—over your head, finger-tips lightly touching only. On your tiptoes—pirouette! There, that is perfect, and I have told you only once! What an example! Camera!"

Cherry posed easily and well. There was nothing difficult to do. She performed her tiny part with natural ease.

Von Stamp decided to make a little more of her. He walked on to the scene and altered the grouping. Then he shifted Miss King-King slightly to one side.

"Herr Von Stamp, what's this for? It's *my* scene," she told him indignantly.

He held up his hand.

"Pardon me, it is my scene." His voice was cold. Miss King and he had been at loggerheads throughout. He lifted the megaphone, shouting to the collected company:

"Please draw right away from the center, so as not to obstruct the view of Columbine. Please to hold it, *liebchen.* Your pose is lovely. Now, Mr. Malone," he addressed a handsome youth in evening clothes, "you had too much drink, remember. You stand up—swaying. You rush to Columbine, seize her in your arms and kiss her. No, not like that. Don't peck at her, my fellow! Make a meal! I'll have to show you!"

He strode onto the set.

"Watch me," he said. "After champagne you kiss like this, especially if you hold beauty in your arms. So!"

Cherry was taken unawares as Von Stamp seized her in an embrace, so unexpected and violent that the breath was literally shaken out of her. The next second his lips crushed over hers, seeking them first and then her throat and neck.

Alfred Fitch uncomfortably turned to Burney beside him.

"Are you going to allow that?" he said. "It's quite uncalled for. You ought to interfere."

Burney did not budge. "Why should I?"

But Cherry had come to herself. As Von Stamp's grasp on her relaxed, she gathered herself together and dealt him a stinging blow across the cheek. He staggered back, speechless with surprise.

"Now finish your picture!" she cried furiously. "And do not dare to insult me, Monsieur Pig of a director, or I will smash-ups your camera before you can make the shoots!"

The rebuke sobered Von Stamp. He knew he had overstepped the mark,

and so did every one else on the set; but, that he, an autocrat, had been slapped in public by a little no-account chit was an unforgettable affront.

He assumed, however, an amused tolerance in order to carry off the situation. He made a deep, mock bow, and pitched his voice so that Cherry only could hear.

"So you prefer to declare war, my little child?"

X

ON the way home Burney read Cherry a lecture over her passage-at-arms with Von Stamp. He was not so angry as she had expected, the reason being because he had a signed contract in his pocket from Alfred Fitch, engaging himself as well as Cherry for a picture which was going into production at once. The financial horizon was distinctly brighter; Cherry was going to be his mascot. But it wouldn't do to let her imagine she was anything out of the ordinary.

"Well, I've started you going, I think," he remarked. "And now you've got to work hard and show what you can do. Friday we're going to start down South on location. We'll be away a month, perhaps—it depends on the weather. Don't start smacking any more directors in the face, or you'll get a reputation. You've ruined yourself with Von Stamp, and he's the biggest of the lot." He droned on and on, bragging, dictating, advising.

Cherry unwound her slender legs and stretched them before her like a tired kitten. She kept thinking of Marlton and her broken rendezvous, revisioning his kind eyes, his kind face—everything about him that was so different from this overbearing man she hated. She looked upon him almost with worship.

"Any questions you'd like to ask me?" Burney offered. "I don't believe you've been listening to a word I said."

Cherry came down to earth.

"Am I to be recompensed for this work?" she inquired, fixing him with her big eyes in a way that made him shift his own.

"Well, yes; I'll give you some pocket money if you behave yourself," he conceded. "You won't be earning anything to speak of. Fitch is giving you a little part to please me, because he wants to secure me especially for this film. I've got an important rôle—the biggest I've ever played."

He threw out his huge shoulders.

"I haven't been appreciated as I ought in this country. I've often been mistaken for Ronald Colman."

He glared at her as she suddenly exploded with amusement.

"Oh, la, la!" She wiped her eyes. "Please to excuse. I could not help it. Maybe you do not often look in the glass? My good Burney, where the handsome face is concerned, you are *behind the door.*"

"Oh, you think so, do you?" Burney bridled. "That's because you're no judge of manly beauty. I can tell you this: there isn't a woman who wouldn't fall for me if I wanted her to, or a girl either. I've only to stretch out my finger, and I could get an heiress any time. Why, I've seen people turn round to look at me in the street, over and over again!"

"That is because you are so funny," Cherry explained.

Perhaps fortunately he did not hear. He reached for his hat and stick as the train drew into the station. "You can buy some ravioli over on Ninth Avenue and come down on the 'L.' Here's half a dollar! Hurry up, and

no dawdling, mind!" he called to her as he dived into the subway.

She quickened her steps. The prospect of ravioli for supper allured her as well, for she was fond of them.

And then the inspiration came. Here was the chance Rosa had bade her watch for—the third attempt to run away from Burney. She could go to Marlton now! She must—she would! She stood hesitant on the curb, then turned and began to walk eastward. But she was so tired, and it was far. At the corner of the avenue a taxi was drawn up, and she looked into the driver's sardonic eyes over the wheel.

"Tell me," she said eagerly, "would fifty cents take me to this place on Park Avenue?"

She produced Marlton's card, and held it toward him. He squinted at it.

"Shouldn't wonder, sister. Hop in!"

So Cherry hopped. She was in for it now. She could not go back to Burney without his supper or his money. A shiver ran over her. But Marlton would save her; he would tell her what to do.

She gave the taxi man her last coin when he deposited her in front of the great house. In answer to her ring, a young footman opened the door. The bright light from the hall lamp streamed full upon the girl's wistful little face and appealing eyes.

"Sorry, miss, Dr. Marlton is not at home," he replied, in answer to her breathless question. "In fact he's out of town."

Chance

HOW many times we must have met
Here on the street as strangers do,
Children of chance we were, who passed
The door of heaven and never knew!

—*Sara Teasdale*

What should she do now? Was he going to kiss her?

The Kiss That Awakened

Only the right Prince could break the spell that bound the Sleeping Beauty; to only one man could Ruth give her lips and he—

By Marjorie Gleyre

Author of "Jungle Sweetheart," etc.

"HERE comes one of the cadets now," whispered Susie to Ruth, with a nod toward the door of the dining room.

Ruth's heart fluttered at sight of the straight young figure in immaculate uniform. He was not too tall, but he was sturdy, and carried himself with fascinating military erectness. As he passed her table, in the wake of an elderly couple, he looked directly into her eyes and smiled ever so faintly.

"What do you think of your first uniform?" Mr. Prescott, Susie's father, asked Ruth banteringly.

Ruth blushed to the lobes of her ears, which peeked forth from clinging curls, for the cadet and his folks were seating themselves at the very next table. And the soldier boy had once more looked at her and smiled!

With her heart beating an excited tattoo underneath the folds of her sister Clare's best evening frock, Ruth tried to affect a nonchalant grown-up manner. In all her short fifteen years nothing as thrilling as this had ever happened to her before—to go to a hop at a Military Academy!

It had come about suddenly and unexpectedly. Susie Prescott's brother, who was in the senior class at the Military Academy, had invited Susie to the dance, and asked her to bring a girl friend. Claire, Ruth's older sister, being Susie's best friend, was, of course, asked to go. At the last minute—just before Susie rang the doorbell, in fact—Clare became ill, and instead of setting out for the dance, took off her gay frock and went to bed.

Susie was much perturbed at this turn of affairs.

"Fred will have a fit if I show up without an extra girl," she fretted, sitting on the edge of the bed where Clare lay huddled up beneath the covers.

"Ask any of the girls," moaned Clare.

"Every solitary soul is dated tonight!" Susie bewailed.

Just then Ruth came in with a hot water bottle for her sister.

"Take the kid," advised Clare weakly. "She really acts older than I do—and she dances beautifully."

Susie looked doubtfully at Ruth, who stood with hands clasped and eyes shining at the mere thought.

"She's only fifteen," Susie hesitated. "But Fred will be so sore if I fail him—all right, Rudy, get ready quickly. Step on it, honey."

"What 'll I wear?" Ruth turned from Susie to Clare in perplexed excitement.

"Wear my frock," murmured Clare, "you're almost as tall as I am."

In a surprisingly short time Ruth was ready. She looked fully as old as Clare—who was eighteen—in that sophisticated frock, and with her curls dressed sleekly. Besides, as Clare had said, she acted older than her years, for she had a dignity and reserve not usual in girls of her age.

And here she was at the hotel where they were to have dinner before going on to the hop.

SHE stole a slantwise look at the fascinating cadet at the next table and dropped her eyes in confusion as they met his. Leaning over to Susie, she whispered ever so low:

"Why does that fellow keep looking at me?"

Susie laughed outright. Then whispered back, "I guess he thinks you are easy to look at!"

Rudy blushed again—her ready blush was the youngest thing about her. "Why isn't he at the school?" she asked softly.

"They can get permission to come to the hotel for dinner with their people or friends. Those are his parents, I guess."

The next time the youth caught Rudy's eye—he had been deliberately trying to do so for some time—he motioned to the tablecloth beside him. Rudy stared to see what his idea was. Then very inconspicuously he wove a pattern of pins—he seemed to have an endless supply somewhere in his suit—

just where the tablecloth hung over the edge of the table, so that his folks could not see. They were talking together, and paid no attention anyway.

Rudy, watching the pins go in, realized that he was making letters and words. Gradually the sentence was formed: *I like you* — all spelled out with pins. She could not suppress a giggle of embarrassed elation. He was such a nice looking boy, and—what meant a lot to her—must be nineteen or twenty. So different from the kids she knew at home! She always felt older than they, but what good did that do when every one called her the Kid—to her burning indignation.

And at last, here was a real grown-up fellow who was accepting her on common ground! It was too good to be true. She glanced up at him shyly and smiled.

The pins began to change their story. He was busy with them for a while, and Rudy was afraid she would not get the message as Mr. Prescott was paying the check. But just as they got up to go she read: *See you later.*

She gave an almost imperceptible nod of acquiescence and followed Susie out of the room with her most dignified glide, though her heart was racing madly.

"If he didn't fall for you like nobody's business!" exclaimed Susie when they were outside. "I'll have to look out for you, or you'll steal all my heavies."

"Who would have thought the little girl would turn into such a dizzy peach!" chaffed Mr. Prescott.

"Am I acting all right?" begged Ruth breathlessly, clutching Susie's arm. "I don't act like a kid, do I? I look old enough, don't I?"

"You look fine!" Susie encouraged her. "Just be natural and you'll be okay. You have always acted about a hundred years old anyway!"

"YOU dance divinely, princess," he breathed into her ear from his slightly superior height.

Having just received a wicked kick on the back of her heel from one of the other dancers, Ruth knew she was awake without needing to pinch herself. This was better than a dream, anyway. Her hero of the dining room had sought her out the minute she appeared in the ballroom. He had come up beside Fred and laid a commanding hand on his arm. Introductions had followed.

"Rudy, this is our impresario," Fred had announced with a grin; "he leads the band."

And then Rudy was borne off in Alex's arms. For the first few times around the floor she was too flustered to talk. It was so wonderful—"super-wonderful," as she told Clare afterward. The stirring music, the boys all in trig uniform, the girls in their lovely evening frocks!

Ruth had four dances with Alex, and each time he became more flattering in his remarks.

"Look here a minute!" he exclaimed suddenly.

She looked up quickly, met his impudent stare, and looked shyly away again.

"Your eyes are like stars," he murmured in a caressing tone. "If only they would shine for me alone!"

"Stars shine for everybody," she said, hoping that was a good line. How she wished that she had listened to Clare and her boy friends when she had had the opportunity, riding in the rumble seat, or at the movies. Then she could have been sure how an older girl would respond.

"Your lips are like a rosebud, just beginning to open," he continued, undaunted.

The rosebud lips parted and then closed self-consciously. It was a new and thrilling experience to be the subject of such lovely compliments. Rudy's vanity had never been so gratified before. This time she made no comment. She did not know what to say, so she just kept still, though she smiled in an encouraging fashion.

Just then some one bumped into her from the side. Alex's arms closed protectively about her while he glared at the offender, who was one of the very young cadets with an equally young partner.

"Those kids make me sick," he told Ruth in an annoyed tone. "I don't see why they are allowed at the hops, they belong home in the nursery."

Ruth looked at the couple under discussion and saw that the girl was about her own age—and looked it. If Alex knew how old she was he would think that she, too, belonged in the nursery! She trembled inwardly.

"I'll see that the infants don't bump into you again," said Alex.

His arms closed more consciously around her. Ruth noticed it, and became aware that she was in a man's arms—conventionally, of course—but nevertheless in his arms. Naturally, she had known all along that she was dancing with him, but she had been so absorbed with his compliments, so intent on the effect she was creating, that she had not realized his effect on her. Now she began to feel this.

Perhaps it was not just because he was the best dancer that she enjoyed her dances with him the most. He danced well enough, but the tall redheaded chap had a smoother glide. It must be because Alex was more romantic to her. She could easily imagine that he was the fairy prince coming for her with the glass slipper, or that she was the sleeping beauty and he awakened her with a kiss. Had he not called her princess?

"Would you like a breath of fresh air?" he inquired presently. "We might stroll down the Ramble."

"The Ramble?"

"That's the path through the woods to the waterfall," he explained. "It's all lit up with Chinese lanterns. I think you'll like it. They all seem to like it."

"All right. Let's go." If "they all seemed to like it," it must be the thing to do.

"I'm pretty hot," commented Alex, mopping his face with his handkerchief. "Hot and bothered."

SO they left the building, walked around it, and started down the Ramble. From Alex's description Rudy had expected a sort of Gay White Way. Instead she found a narrow lane of flickering light and black shadows, mostly shadows, for the lanterns were hung at long intervals. And from the distance came the sound of running water—the waterfall.

"Nice and cool out here," her escort observed after they had walked a while. "Suppose we sit down, princess."

She wondered where they were to sit. But he took her arm and guided her into a deep shadow and drew her down on a bench under a tree.

"Now we can see without being seen," he whispered as another couple emerged into a spot of light for a moment, and then became lost in shadow.

She giggled uncertainly. What was she to do next? What would he do next? So far everything had gone

beautifully. Evidently he thought she was as old as Susie.

Somehow she knew he was sliding his arm along the bench behind her, though she could not see it—she could see nothing but the white gleam of his collar and a light blur that was his face.

"Kiss me, princess!" he muttered close to her lips, while his hand found her shoulder and drew her toward him.

"Let's go back and dance some more," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. It was exciting, fascinating, to have him make love to her, but at the same time upsetting. She felt at a disadvantage through her inexperience, and dreaded disclosing her age by some slip.

"Don't you want to kiss me?" he pleaded. His fingers caressed her cheek gently. "Your skin is like satin," he murmured, and coaxed her face toward his.

She felt unable to resist. He was her fairy prince, and he wanted to kiss her. How could she deny him? She swayed toward him, her rosebud lips drooping a trifle apart. His cheek brushed hers before he found her mouth. As his lips met hers and clung, his arms encircled her, straining her soft young body close.

The kiss was a shock just at first; she had never been kissed like that before. But the warmth of his lips and arms coaxed her into acquiescence, and for a moment she abandoned herself to his embrace under the spell of a strange rapture.

Then she struggled away from him, trembling slightly.

"Let's go and dance," she repeated huskily.

"Give me another — wonderful—wonderful kiss," he begged fervently, running his fingers through the short curls at the nape of her neck. "Please, princess—be generous."

She let him have his way—just to see if the second could be as rapturous as the first. The heart which beat so furiously beneath her immature little breast was learning its lesson. The sleeping princess was being awakened by a kiss. Her arms went around his neck, and for a long moment they were locked in each other's embrace.

"Now—let's go—and dance," she whispered, when once more she had freed herself.

She thought that she could not stand another kiss. Already she felt bewitched. She did not seem like the same Ruth who had so thoughtlessly donned her sister's gown earlier in the evening. *This* Ruth had found her fairy prince, and had opened the book of romance.

"How about a drink?" Alex suggested as they reëntered the hall.

He led her to a seat in a quiet corner and went off for some punch. While he was gone Rudy hastily opened her vanity to see if her make-up needed any repairing. The color had been wiped off her lips, but they were crimson in their own right now! She stared at them a moment, biting at them with her sharp white teeth to see if they felt the same as usual. Just as she decided that they did and didn't, Alex appeared, and she closed the vanity with a snap.

He grinned at her mischievously. "Repairing the damage?" he asked.

"No damage done," she retorted as calmly as she could. He must never know what a novel experience his kisses had been. She must let him think that it was nothing new to her to be kissed.

He seated himself beside her and they sipped the punch.

"Where have you been all my life, princess?" he asked, as he set their emptied glasses down on the floor beside him.

heard! She sat sliding her sorority ring back and forth over her knuckle, while she tried to conquer her confusion.

She swung her club recklessly. The next instant she heard a thud!

It was the first time this had been said to Rudy. She thought it was original, and the nicest thing she had ever

Suddenly the ring slipped completely off her finger and went jingling across the floor. Alex captured it.

"Wonder if I can get it on one of my fingers?" he said, slipping it over his little finger.

With a good deal of coaxing he got it on. Then it would not come off again.

"Well," he said, "I guess it 'll just have to stay there."

"You'd better give it back to me," she said in some concern.

He pretended to try to take it off again, but it refused to go over his joint.

"It wants to stay," he declared. "I'll tell you what, though, fair exchange is no robbery, you wear mine until I get some soap and water and ease this off."

He took his school ring from his finger and fitted it on Rudy's. It just about fit her middle finger.

"There we are!" he said contentedly. "Now how about another dance? Something tells me they'll play 'Home, Sweet Home' before we are ready for it!"

"Will you answer if I write to you?" he asked earnestly, when they were once more gliding around the floor.

"I—I guess so!" she agreed.

Ever since he had kissed her she had been in a fluttery state. Nothing about her seemed real—nothing, that is, except her fairy prince. The thought that soon the dance would be over and she would have to go away from him filled her with dread, while at the same time she wanted to be all alone to think over what had happened.

All the way home—a two-hour motor trip—Rudy sat in a corner of the car with eyes closed, treasuring her memory. She kept one hand clasped over the other so she could feel Alex's ring all the time. Nothing had been said, in the confusion of departure, about returning the rings to their respective owners. Alex must want to wear her ring and to have her wear his! Ecstatic thought!

"Have a good time with the soldier boys, kid?" boomed Mr. Prescott from the front seat.

"Ssh! Dad," Susie warned. "Ruth's asleep. She's all in."

Rudy was not asleep, and she heard this conversation. But she did not want to speak and interrupt her reverie—she was glad they thought her asleep. She just wanted to think about Alex, to remember every little thing about him.

He had dark, heavy hair, parted neatly above. But what color were his eyes? She couldn't recall that, though she *could* recall the way they looked at her, softly yet glowingly—just the way a fairy prince should look at the princess. And his mouth—she couldn't remember exactly how it looked, but she could still feel it against hers!

"Rudy, honey, we're home."

It was Susie's voice, accompanied by a gentle shake. Rudy opened her eyes, blinked dazedly, and realized that she had been asleep after all.

THE next day Rudy sat on the edge of Clare's bed and told her all about it. Alex—Alex—Alex, was the refrain.

"So you've gone gaga about that cadet boy?" Clare laughed.

"He's not a 'boy'!" exclaimed Ruth indignantly. "He's quite grown up. He's one of the oldest cadets. He's wonderful! He leads the band, and is the prize cornet player. And he said he'd write to me— Oh, Clare, how soon do you suppose I'll get a letter?"

"If he's really trying to make you, kid," Clare encouraged her, "he'll probably write this week."

"Oh!" wailed Rudy in sudden dismay. "He doesn't even know my name! He just called me 'princess.'"

"He'll find it out from Fred," Clare soothed her. "That's easy enough."

Ruth was the first one at breakfast every morning that week! The miracle was accounted for by the fact that the postman came just at that time. But no letter arrived from Alex. Every day Rudy went hopefully through the mail, and each time she was disappointed.

"You said he'd write this week, didn't you?" she demanded dolefully of Clare.

"I should have *thought* so—if all you told me was true."

"It was, it was, Clare! Honest! Haven't I got his ring?"

Clare frowned thoughtfully. "Perhaps he's the kind of fellow who rushes all the girls," she suggested at length.

"I don't think so," objected Rudy. "He really seemed in earnest."

"But you wouldn't know, honey," Clare said gently. "You haven't had an experience—" Ruth looked so miserable that she added comfortingly: "Maybe he's the kind that simply can't write letters, no matter how good his intentions are. There are people like that. After all, he must have liked you to give you his ring. He can't throw rings around wholesale."

"What good will it do me?" mourned Rudy. "If he doesn't write—and if I never see him again?"

"You'll see him," Clare declared positively. "We'll manage that somehow. So cheer up, kid. You'd better be digging into your Latin instead of mooning about Alex, anyway!"

A few weeks later Susie invited Clare to drive out to the Academy for a Sunday visit. They were going to take some things out to Fred. Clare, who felt very sorry for her little sister, persuaded Susie to include Rudy in the party.

Ruth received the news with enthusiastic joy, but before they were ready to start, her joy had turned to trepidation. She was crazy to see Alex again; to see whether he really was as nice as she remembered him, to have that sweet rapture of speaking to him, or just of meeting his eyes. But because he had not written the promised letter, she dreaded lest she find him different.

She worried the life out of Clare with her questions.

"Shall I ask him why he didn't write?" she fretted. "Would it be all right to ask him that?"

"It would all depend on how he acts," Clare replied patiently. "You might kid him along about being a prize letter-writer. Or you might be a little cool, and say, as if you were offended, 'You're a fine one to keep a promise!' Or perhaps it would be best to ignore it, as if you had never given it another thought. You don't want to let him think he's too important to you—not right at first."

Rudy, twisting the ring around her finger and meditating on Clare's advice, began to think that life was very complicated. You couldn't just say the first thing that came to you—the natural thing. It would be most natural for her, she ruminated, to go up to Alex and say outright, "Why didn't you write to me? I have watched every mail for your letter." But that simply wouldn't do.

THE cadets were on parade outside when the girls arrived, and Ruth thought she had never seen such a thrilling sight in her life. Her heart gave a bound as she recognized

Alex in charge of the band. How marvelous he looked in his dress uniform, standing so stiff and straight! Oh, he was even nicer than she had remembered him! She wouldn't be able to bear it if anything went wrong now.

She beat time to the martial music, and stared enraptured as the cadets marched through the parade routine. It was a thrilling sight to her romantic eyes—and, of course, the picture of Alex leading the band was the biggest thrill of all.

"After they are dismissed," Susie explained, "they change their uniforms, and then they are free for a couple of hours. Let's walk around while we are waiting."

So they sauntered along the walks that led around the green and from one building to another. Pretty soon the cadets began to appear in their other uniforms, circulating about the grounds, or talking to visiting relatives.

Now he'll come, Ruth told herself, and her hand closed over his ring for courage. He'll come any minute, now, and then everything will be all right. And then he really did! He appeared around the corner of a building with another fellow, coming directly toward them.

"Here he comes, Rudy," Susie whispered to her.

But Rudy was well aware of it. With the blood pulsing in her cheeks, and her eyes glowing in welcome, she waited. She pretended to be listening to Susie and Clare, but she had no idea what they were saying. Her whole consciousness was centered on Alex.

He drew nearer without seeing her. When will he see me? she wondered, expecting any second to see his face light up in a smile of greeting while he hurried over to her. Once she thought his eyes swept their group, but they gave no sign of recognition.

He was almost up to her. Her lips parted in readiness to utter her greeting, while she waited to see his face brighten as he recognized her. When he was almost abreast of her he looked over at her, as if he had known she was there all the time, and smiled slightly—a smile that touched his lips but left his eyes dead.

"Good afternoon," he muttered with a conventional salute, and passed directly on.

"He didn't speak to me—he didn't even stop," she said with quivering lips.

"The dirty bum!" Clare hissed through set teeth. Then, as she saw the tears in Rudy's eyes, "Careful, kid, don't flood your engine."

"I don't understand it," said Susie in bewilderment. "He was certainly cuckoo about the kid at the dance."

"Perhaps," sniffed Rudy, "he goes cuckoo about every girl he meets, like you said, Clare."

"But he can't have a ring to give each one," Clare objected.

Just then Fred came up, and Rudy controlled herself as well as she could.

"Say, the best joke!" Fred began at once, as if it was too good to keep.

"What joke?" said Susie, hoping it would be funny enough to divert Rudy.

"On the handsome band leader," chuckled Fred. "He's always grouching about the 'kids' that come up to the dances—young sisters, or friends of the juniors, and so forth."

At the first words, "handsome band leader," Ruth had become all attention. Now she listened with a feeling of foreboding—she was going to hear something disastrous, she knew.

"Well, you know how many numbers he danced with Ruth, here, at the

last dance?" Fred chuckled. "He thought she was as old as she looked. When I told the other fellows she was only fifteen—"

"Oh, Fred, you told them!" gasped all three girls in shocked unison.

"Why not?" he demanded airily. "Best joke of the season. So Red Simpson—he's editor of the paper—put in this wow"—he began to open the school paper—"and Alex hasn't been the same since. Ha, ha!"

Ruth stared at the "wow" with glazed eyes. Finally the blur of black and white separated into words, and she read:

> Taking a popularity vote, we find that our handsome band leader is first in the primary, so to speak. All we have to say, Alex, is that you'd better ask the "princess" her age—in consideration of your well-known views—before you walk her down the Ramble again!

"Princess!" gasped Rudy. How had they known that—even that?

"Didn't he call you that?" queried Fred. "One of the fellows said he heard him. We guyed the life out of him."

Rudy gave Clare one agonized look, and then turned and ran to where the auto stood. She got in and crowded way down into a corner. So that was it! He had found out her age! How cruel of Fred to tell! How terrible to print that in the paper for every one to read! Even "princess," and walking down the Ramble. How humiliating for both of them!

No wonder he wouldn't stop to speak to her. Doubtless he never wanted to see her again. But his ring? Her fingers sought it for the slight comfort it might give. She pressed it to her lips. She supposed he considered it beneath his dignity to ask to have it back. He would just ignore the episode as if it had never happened. She smothered her sobs in her handkerchief. Why was she only fifteen? Why couldn't she be grown up?

RUTH'S heart was broken—she was quite sure of that; and she was utterly inconsolable.

"He liked me before he knew how old I was," she said again and again. "And I loved him so—why did they have to tell him? The mean guys."

One minute she was vowing her eternal love for him and the next declaring that she hated him. To rush her like that and then drop her cold! She wanted to make him pay for it—she'd like him to come crawling to her on his knees and beg for her favor.

Her mother reproached her. "It sounds very silly for a little girl like you to talk about being in love," she said severely. "It's most unbecoming."

"Puppy love!" chuckled her father, who took it rather as a joke.

"Well, even puppies have feelings!" Clare reminded him in behalf of the lovelorn Rudy.

As a matter of fact, Ruth's mother was wrong in calling her daughter a "little girl." With Alex's kiss Ruth had ceased to be a little girl. She was mature for her years, having developed early, and having associated a good deal with Clare and her friends. It had needed just that one experience to lift her out of the child class into the world of adults!

When the next hop came around Susie invited both Clare and Ruth.

"Perhaps he's come out of it by now, Rudy," Clare encouraged her. "Maybe he'll dance with you again, anyway."

"It won't be the same," Ruth said gloomily. "My age will always stand between us."

"Not always!" Susie laughed. "Time will cure that."

"Then it will be too late!" the younger girl prophesied glumly.

"I thought you hated him," interposed her father with a twinkle in his eye.

"I do," she agreed vehemently. "If he asks me for a dance I'll look right through him, and tell him they're all engaged. I'll pay him back. He'll have to come crawling before I'll notice him!"

"You won't get a chance!" her dad discouraged her.

On the night of the hop they were passing through the hall leading to the gymnasium at the Academy — Susie, Clare and Ruth—when Rudy saw Alex standing talking to a slim, red-headed girl who wore heavy make-up and was dressed quite extremely. What chance have I against that? she thought in despair. Yet she hoped against hope. Perhaps he would notice her—ask her for a dance.

He looked up as they approached, and Ruth started to smile. But the smile froze on her lips when he met her glance briefly, and then without any sign of recognition, turned his attention back to his companion.

"Listen, kid, you just forget the big frost," Clare said sympathetically. "You're going to have a marvelous time to-night with the other boys. Why, two of them have already asked Susie for an introduction to you! Remember, that was your first kiss. It was probably the kiss and not the fellow that thrilled you. When you get more used to kisses you'll be a better judge of how much a fellow means to you."

"Do you mean I should go around kissing all the fellows?" Ruth demanded with injured sarcasm.

"Of course not. Don't be silly! Be very sparing with your kisses. But if a fellow attracts you a lot, there's no harm in a kiss or two—it will help you to know your own mind. But don't be indiscriminate, don't ever kiss a boy about whom you care nothing—and let it stop at kissing."

After these words of sisterly advice, Clare led Ruth back on the scene again, and presently she was in the gay swirl on the dance floor. If it hadn't been for glimpses of Alex being attentive to other girls, Ruth would have enjoyed herself, for she had every dance taken, and several of the boys were quite persistent in their attentions.

"Would you care to stroll down the Ramble?" asked the youth with whom she was dancing, a pleasant, blond boy with a captivating smile.

She liked him pretty much; he really seemed exceptionally nice. But it wasn't the way she felt about Alex.

"It's an old Spanish custom," she laughed at him, and was going to say she did not care to go, when she heard Alex's voice behind her. He, too, was suggesting the Ramble to his partner. As they circled around in the dance she saw him go out the door with the redhead.

"How about it?" the blond boy urged.

"Let's go!" she acquiesced.

But the experiment was not a success. The blond boy's kiss made no impression at all; she was bored!

"Let's go back and dance," she sighed, partly disappointed, partly relieved.

She told Clare about it that night—or rather, early morning—sitting back on her heels at the foot of Clare's bed.

"It's no go, Clare. I guess it's really Alex that made the big impression and not the kiss." Then her tone grew fierce. "I just wish I'd get the chance to pay him back."

"Princess!" he whispered. "There's only one way to prove it—kiss me!"

"Ssh!" warned Clare. "The rest of the family is sleeping."

"I don't care. I won't be content until he comes crawling to me on his knees begging my pardon."

But of course that was a wild dream.

Ruth went to the Academy a few more times—on the blond boy's invitation—but Alex always ignored her. He did not give her the slightest opportunity for the revenge she craved. Many a night she fell asleep upon a pillow wet with tears. For no matter how sought after she had been, no matter how many times her dances were cut in, there was no consolation in a popularity which did not include Alex. She had put his ring away in her treasure box—poor, scorned ring. Sometimes she put it on at night, as if it were a wishing ring, or a charm to bring her happy dreams. Oh, why must love hurt her like this?

Then the season ended, Alex gradu-

ated, and she saw him no more—that is, not for four years.

RUTH was dressing for a dinner engagement. As she sat at her dresser fastening her softly waved hair back into the small knot which it was just long enough to achieve, she did not even remark how "grown-up" the young lady was who faced her in the mirror. Being grown up was an old story to her now. In fact, she could not have told just when she had reached this once passionately desired state.

The past four years had brought men into her life—and ushered them out. There had been kisses, of course. Still she was fancy free—or rather, fancy bound to an old memory!

She had never forgotten Alex!

Every man she met was weighed against him in her heart and found lacking. She did not know why this was. Again and again she had tried to overcome it, scolded herself for hanging onto a childish attachment so obstinately, and yet it persisted.

So she had given in to it with a degree of resignation. As long as I feel this way, she mused, I might as well accept it. I suppose when the right man comes along I'll change.

She was a little late to the dinner party through an unavoidable delay, and in the confusion of hurried greetings and profuse apologies she found herself seated at the table almost before she knew it. As she cast an interested glance around at the assembled guests, the man who was at her right spoke to her.

"What have I done to merit this blessing?" he said agreeably.

Something in his tone startled her—stirred old memories. She turned her head slowly, and when she met his impudent gaze, she knew him at once. It was Alex—the handsome band leader—her hero of the past.

"Probably nothing," she replied to his question saucily, feeling a warm wave of excitement sweep over her.

She had often told herself that if she met Alex now, and saw him through her more mature eyes, she would not like him as she used to. But she did! He had improved with the years, both in looks and manner, and there was an assurance about him which inspired confidence.

She wondered if he would recognize her; but it was soon evident that he did not. She had changed more than he, and as he had never known her name, that did not stir his recollection.

"I had three other invitations for to-night, and I couldn't account for the compulsion that made me accept this one, because it seemed the least exciting of the lot," he told her, in a confidential tone. "*Now* I know! It was a prophetic intuition."

"Three other invitations for the same evening!" she said. "I suppose I should be impressed with your popularity."

"That's not the point I was trying to make," he retorted.

"Try again," she murmured.

"I can say it in plain English," he assured her. "Fate sent me here to meet you."

"And now that your object is achieved—" She gave him a quick, mirthful glance.

He started to reach for the salt, paused halfway and gave her hand, which was resting on the table, a sudden, bold squeeze, and then picked up the salt as calmly as if nothing out of the way had happened. She glanced about the table to see whether any one had noticed. He was reckless as ever.

She felt the old enchantment returning.

"Now that my object is achieved," he repeated. "Oh, that's just the beginning! This is going to be a continued story."

When Ruth got home that night—Alex had been her escort—she brought out her old treasure box and looked for Alex's ring. For a moment she stared at it as it lay in the palm of her hand, then with a tender smile she slipped it over her finger. Like a sort of charm it brought back the past poignantly—the old heartache—and the old desire for revenge!

The next day, before noon, he had called her up to make a date, vowing that he had been unable to sleep for thinking about her.

"That's a good line," she told him skeptically. "Tried and true!"

"Yes," he admitted cheerfully, "often *tried*—but *true* for the first time to-day!"

RUTH saw a great deal of Alex from that time on. And it wasn't long before he tried to kiss her—in a taxi on the way home from the theater.

"Don't you *want* to kiss me?" he demanded when she turned her face away.

The same words, the same appealing tone of four years ago! It brought back that episode on the Ramble so vividly. And she wanted to kiss him now, perhaps even more than she had then. But she wanted still more to carry out that old plan of revenge.

"Not particularly," she replied with a slight shrug.

"Yes, you do," he contradicted audaciously, and put his head close to hers.

"What makes you think so?" she asked as carelessly as she could, though her lips fairly ached to meet his.

"This!" he replied, and laid his hand against her pounding heart.

She pushed him away hastily, provoked that he had guessed so much.

"You're mistaken for once," she said crushingly. "Maybe all the other girls you know fall for the handsome sheik—but I haven't."

"Haven't you?" he queried tantalizingly, putting his arm around her shoulders. "Well, that ought to be remedied right away."

How she wanted to relax in the curve of his arm—to have him kiss her enough to make up for the four years of waiting! Instead, she drew away.

"It's so hot!" she objected.

After that episode Alex continually tried to persuade her to kiss him. There was no checking him. The firmer her rebuff, the faster his come-back. She enjoyed the game, but found it increasingly hard to play. She was so intensely in love with him that it required a real effort to repulse his advances. But she was obsessed with the idea of punishing him. She wanted to make him suffer as she had suffered years ago.

But Alex did not seem to suffer. He took her attitude with the greatest good nature.

"Little icicle!" he called her, usually adding: "But ice melts sooner or later."

Despite all her coolness he seemed sure of her. She was furious with herself, for she felt that she was yielding, quite against her will.

Then he suggested that she let him teach her to play golf. They had a lot of fun at that, although she was not a very apt pupil. Somehow she did not take to it easily.

"You don't hold the club right," he told her, on their second outing. "Here, let me show you."

Standing behind her on the pretext of showing her how to place her hands, he took advantage of his position to let his arms inclose her in swift yearning.

"Isn't this nice?" he murmured, kissing the curve of her neck.

Feeling the warmth of his love in that close embrace was almost too much for her power of resistance.

"Alex, don't!" she cried vehemently, squirming away. Because she wanted to enjoy the sweet comfort of his arms it made her all the more angry. "I came out here to play golf—and I'm going to play!"

With that she swung her club recklessly. As it went back over her shoulder she felt a dull impact and checked her stroke to whirl around to see what had caused it. She was just in time to see Alex sway, turn slightly on his heel, and drop to the ground.

She had raised her club without giving him time to get out of the way, and had struck him on the head!

For a ghastly moment she stood staring down at his inert form and wondering whether she had killed him. She felt cold all over—too frozen to move. But the next moment her blood pulsed madly through her veins, warming her to action.

She dropped to her knees beside him and felt for his heart. It was beating, but his eyes were closed, and he seemed scarcely to breathe. Almost sobbing with fright, she looked wildly about for help. The place was deserted.

Watching anxiously for any sign of life, she took his head in her lap and brushed the hair back from his brow. The touch stirred her so strongly that without thinking she leaned over and pressed her lips to his forehead.

As she drew slowly away his eyes opened and met her glance squarely. Then he chuckled. She felt weak with relief, for he must be all right if he could laugh. So she started to smile back at him, but the smile never appeared, for the realization dawned upon her that he knew she had kissed him—and that was why he chuckled! She became unbearably warm, and knew that she was blushing outrageously.

"You kissed me!" he remarked jubilantly. "And how!"

"I thought you were badly hurt—" she started to explain.

Before she suspected his intention, and could evade him, his arms flew up and imprisoned her, drawing her down to him till her lips met his passionate kiss. She did not respond, but it was a second before she could break away.

"You don't act hurt at all!" she accused.

"I'm not," he replied, sitting up beside her. "You only touched my shoulder."

"Then why—?"

"I wanted to see what you would do!"

That was too much. To think that he had been feigning unconsciousness to make her give herself away—and that she had done just that—filled her with unreasoning anger. And to see him sitting there grinning with satisfaction fanned her anger to fury. Scarcely knowing what she did, she raised her hand and slapped him, a stinging blow across the mouth.

"I never want to see you again!" she flared, springing to her feet. "I hate you!"

She turned from his stare of stupefied amazement and stalked off without a backward glance. He let her go, though she had expected him to follow

her. She thought that he would be contrite and apologetic; that his punishment would fill him with regretful shame; that perhaps now it had come—the time when he would get on his knees to her. And instead he let her go without a move to stop her!

But maybe he was seriously offended. Maybe she had insulted him. She told herself that she hoped so. Of all the conceited males! To suspect that she cared more for him than she would admit, and to trick her into showing it! Truly, she never wanted to see him again.

SHE still felt that way two days later when he telephoned. The fact that he had waited two days stimulated her grievance. Why hadn't he called at once? Didn't he care whether she wanted to see him or not?

"Hello, sweetheart," he said breezily. "Have you come out of it?"

"Come out of what?" she asked haughtily.

"Your bad temper. I thought I'd better wait till the storm blew over. How about taking in a show tonight?"

"I never want to see you again," she said firmly, and hung up the receiver.

She felt just a twinge of conscience at treating him so brutally, but after all he deserved it, he had brought it upon himself. And anyway, he had not acted the least bit sorry—he was as far as ever from groveling in the dust!

He called up again two days with the same irritating greeting. "Hello, sweetheart. Snapped out of it yet?" And she was so disappointed at him for taking that attitude—as though he had done nothing amiss and she was acting like a sulky child—that she hung up without saying a word.

After that she did not hear from him for some time. Finally he called up with an invitation to a dinner dance, and spoke as if it were the most natural thing in the world to expect her to accept. If he had offered even one word of apology she would have opened her heart to him.

In the time that she had waited to hear from him, she had had the opportunity to test herself. She knew she loved him more deeply than ever, and with a passion which had been unknown to her as a young girl. Even the idea of bringing him to his knees before her, of making him suffer, had been thrown in the discard. She wanted him too much to care whether he came on his knees or not!

But she did expect a more humble attitude from him, a willingness to admit that he might have been in the wrong. And when he spoke with arrogant assurance—with a tone which seemed to imply that its owner, like the king, could do no wrong—her heart hardened.

"I'm sorry," she replied to the invitation in a cool, remote voice, "but I have other plans."

"You can change them," he said with his silken persuasiveness. "You'll change them *for me,* won't you?"

"For Heaven's sake!" she exploded, "you seem to think you're God's gift to woman!"

And this time he hung up!

NOT long after this Susie invited Ruth to go with her to the military school from which her youngest brother was graduating.

"It will seem like old times, Ruth," said Susie. "Remember when you had a crush on the handsome band leader?"

Susie did not know that Alex had

appeared on Ruth's horizon once more. She thought that Ruth had long ago recovered from her schoolgirl infatuation.

Ruth accepted the invitation. She was trying to shut Alex from her heart and thought that this might help. Going back there might remind her of his former unkind behavior, and turn her more definitely against him. Since this was her argument it was a queer thing for her to get out the ring he had given her and wear it for the occasion. But she did not even try to explain that act to herself!

As they drew near the school her heart began to act as foolishly as it had when she was fifteen. She almost expected to find Alex there. In fact, the moment she saw the band, her eyes sought out its leader, and she felt a distinct shock of disappointment to see a tall thin youth in the place that had been Alex's.

The gymnasium was crowded for the dance. Ruth noticed how many men were present who were not in uniform, but did not think much about it until in the middle of the evening one of them put a firm hand on the shoulder of the young cadet with whom she was dancing. Cutting in! How queer, she thought, because she knew nobody except a few of the boys to whom Susie's brother had introduced her.

Then she saw his face—and thought that she was being hypnotized by the memories which the scene had stirred up. It was Alex!

She was in his arms and halfway around the room before she had recovered sufficiently from her surprise to speak.

"What are you doing here?" she queried.

"It's Alumni Day," he explained, "but I've never attended an Alumni meeting before—so you see it's you who have brought me! I wondered what made me decide to come. But what are *you* doing here?"

"The brother of a friend of mine is graduating," she explained in her turn.

"I was terribly nervous," he told her, though his voice belied his words. "I was afraid you'd refuse to dance with me."

"I was too surprised at seeing you to know what I did," she said distantly. "And I doubt if you had any such fears!"

"I really had," he insisted. "Believe it or not, I've been watching you for most of the evening and getting up my courage to approach you. I saw you almost immediately."

"I had no idea you would be here," she remarked frigidly, resisting his firm hold a little.

His arms tightened obstinately. "What have I done to deserve such treatment?"

"You know very well what you've done!" she said impatiently.

If he did not know he was too dense for any use, and if he did know it was hateful of him to pretend like that. She wanted to hate him; but somehow she found that was impossible while she was in his arms!

"Have you ever been here before?" he asked her.

"Oh, years ago," she replied carelessly, and was suddenly conscious of his ring on her finger. If he saw that would he remember? One of the reasons she had not recalled their first meeting to him had been the fear that he would not remember. It would be so humiliating to learn that he had quite forgotten what had meant—and still meant—so much to her. If she had been successful in bringing him to his knees the past would not be so bit-

ter. But she seemed as far from subjugating him as ever.

"Been around here at all?" he asked. "Seen the Ramble? Suppose we saunter out for a breath of fresh air."

She wondered if he felt her heart leap against his. The Ramble! If he took her there she knew that she was lost. She would not be able to resist him—but she did not want to. All her desire to conquer him was gone; she did not even care for an apology. All she wanted was to be in his arms where she belonged, to have her lips quickened by his.

"Yes, let's go out and get cooled off," she agreed with outward composure.

They went out and walked hand in hand down the path of light and shadow that she remembered so well. Her fingers were crushed in his unconsciously fierce grip; and she enjoyed the pain. The sound of the waterfall in the distance was like a love song in her ears. He led her aside into a shadow. It couldn't be—but it was—the same bench where they had sat together four years ago!

For a moment he sat with his hands clasped between his knees. She could dimly make out his attitude. And she wondered at it. It was unlike the confident, fast-working Alex.

Suddenly he slid off the bench onto his knees before her, reaching up to put his arms about her waist.

"Ruth!" he panted, "forgive me—forgive me for everything. It's my damned pride. I don't deserve one kind word from you after the mean trick I played on you. But I love you—I worship you. Please say you forgive me."

He dropped his head forward against her breast and she could feel his deep, nervous breathing. He was on his knees to her at last—but she did not even realize it! Her happiness at his declaration of love was too overwhelming to admit any lesser thoughts. She ran her fingers caressingly through his hair, across his cheek, down his neck.

"Oh, Alex," she said chokily, "I forgive you anything — I love you—I've loved you ever since—"

He interrupted her by springing to his feet and carrying her up with him into his arms, straining her to him. Then he sought her lips. She gave them to him fully, freely, abandoning herself to the ecstasy of the contact. This was the magic of the past increased fourfold.

Presently he drew back. He peered into her face in the darkness.

"Princess!" he gasped.

"Yes," she acknowledged softly. "But how do you know?"

"Your kiss," he replied huskily. "No other kiss has ever stirred me so."

"Then you remember?"

"I have never forgotten," he said solemnly. "I loved that little girl—four years ago — but wounded pride kept me from realizing it."

"Oh, Alex, I loved you so!" she cried, with some of the old heartache in her tone. "And you were so cruel to me."

"I know it," he groaned. "It was hard to treat you like that, you had made an awful hit with me. But the fellows razzed me so when they found out your age, because I was always fuming about the kids. And my darned pride couldn't stand it. You seemed older than fifteen, too."

"I was old for my age—old in feelings, too."

"Every time I saw you I wanted to

speak, I wanted you for my girl, princess. But I knew the fellows were just laying for me. If I spoke to you again I'd never have heard the end of it."

"It's past now," she sighed happily.

"Come!" he pulled her into the light. "Let's take a look at you and see why I did not recognize you all along. Did you know me?"

"Of course. The minute you spoke to me at that dinner, even before I looked at you."

"Wonderful girl! My princess!"

He stood looking at her rapturously in the uncertain light from a Chinese lantern.

"You've changed a lot," he decided. "And I never would have known you if you hadn't kissed me like that! But now I can see a resemblance to my little princess." Then in a jokingly accusing tone, "You never returned my ring!"

"You never asked me for it!"

"You're supposed to return things of that sort when all is over."

"I couldn't have lived through those first few weeks without it," she said, and then added, laughing: "But all was not over!"

"You thought it was," he chaffed.

"I did not, *you* did," she retorted. "Here, take your old ring."

When she started to draw it disdainfully from her finger he realized she had been wearing it all evening, and he threw back his head with a delighted laugh.

"But you've got nothing on me!" he assured her. From the depths of a pocket he drew forth the ring she had given him in exchange for his. "Now you'll believe I remember. This has been my good luck piece all these years."

"It's too beautiful!" she sighed.

He scowled down at her. "You don't *look* much like my little lost princess," he said dubiously. "But there's one way I can make sure—!"

He swept her from her feet with his strong arms and carried her back to the bench. Seating himself with her on his lap, he whispered, "Come on, prove it!"

Stars of Adventure

LIFE'S a blue, blue sky, where white
Stars of adventure shine.
Let me be your adventure,
And you be mine.

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

Love's Race With Death

She read the fatal words, her blood frozen in her veins

A few words scrawled on a bit of bloodstained paper spelled the end of love!

By George Metcalf Johnson

SOMETHING was wrong far down the valley beyond Navaho Point. Vera Willis, from an inconspicuous perch near the summit of the rugged peak, whipped out her field glasses and brought them to a focus. Objects formerly blurred and indistinct now leaped magically into clear view. She saw a man who squatted indolently before a small fire, built in a sheltered hollow; several prostrate and hog-tied calves; a sorrel horse, anchored by dropped bridle reins, on his right hip a blotch of white.

"Caught red-handed!" Vera muttered. "If I could only get a line on his features, so I'd recognize the hombre!" But the handicap of distance was too great, and she had to be content with merely general details. He was of more than average height and muscular development; that, and the fact that he wore bat-wing chaps, comprised the total of what she could discern.

Some months previous Vera Willis had returned to the range country after a long visit with an aunt who

lived in the east. The time spent away had brought undoubted advantages, but to Vera there was something vital lacking in the smart sophistication of her eastern friends. She missed the frankness of the West—the free-and-easy, unspoiled people who rode its ranges. Most of all she missed the limitless expanse of sun-drenched country itself, the broad sweep of rolling land that stretched to the far horizon.

Vera now recalled a conversation with her father, John B. Willis, prosperous rancher and owner of the Circle Star spread; he had been summarizing local news for the girl's benefit shortly after her return.

"Sandy McPherson sold his place on Wildcat Creek."

"Who bought it?" Vera asked.

"Rank outsider by name of Dave Hollister." A queer inflection of J. B.'s voice brought a quick glance from his daughter.

"What sort is he, dad? O. K.?"

"No! Owns too dawgoned many calves for the cows on his range," was the significant reply. "Otherwise he's a decent appearing hombre; 'cept that he favors bat-wing chaps."

Vera had to smile, knowing of old the childish and wholly unreasonable prejudice her father had always entertained against bat-wing chaps and riders who used them.

"Do you know for a fact that Hollister's been running an iron on Circle Star calves?"

"Of course I know it," was the testy response. "But knowing and proving are two different things. Whole country's gone to pot. Frank Davenport lost a couple of gold shipments from the Hidden Fortune the past year. Somebody's riding to a necktie party. Reckon I could name the guy, too—if I was pressed for an opinion."

THOUGHTFULLY Vera returned the glasses to their case. "One thing's certain," she reflected. "That hombre's no Circle Star waddy; his chaps prove it. I'll tell dad what I've seen, and let him use his judgment. This may bring a showdown . . . I wonder what Dave Hollister looks like. I've always wanted to meet an honest to goodness cattle rustler."

Vera mounted her horse and rode down the back slope of Navaho Point. In due season she approached the section where she had watched the calf brander at his work.

"Dad said Hollister's mark was O Bar O," she mused. "If I run across a calf with that brand fresh on its hide he'd likely consider prompt action was called for. Let's go, cayuse."

She checked him at the top of a low hill, close by a scattering of piñon pines. Thus for a moment Vera sat, eyes roving over the country ahead. Pete shook his head, resenting the presence of a buzzing yellow jacket.

"Hold still, you rascal," she ordered. "I'll crown that varmint for you."

Vera reached forward to swing at the hornet with one of her gauntlets. She struck the hovering insect fair and square, but by an unlucky chance drove it sharply into Pete's right ear. His outraged reaction caught her wholly unprepared. The agony of that hornet sting deep in the tender portions of his ear transformed Pete from a well-behaved cayuse to a raging, berserk demon. Up in the air he went, back arched like a fighting tom cat, and the jerk nearly snapped Vera's head from her shoulders.

Vera Willis was a rider of better than usual ability, even for the West, where girls learn to ride about as soon as they learn to walk. But there are limits. She had been lounging at ease in the saddle, and Pete's first frantic plunge caused her to lose a stirrup. Thus from the start she had a terrific disadvantage. Unless she could recover that stirrup her chances of staying aboard were exceedingly slim.

One dizzy, twisting jump followed another with bewildering speed, Pete alternately flattening and arching his backbone in a series of vicious snaps that made Vera's teeth rattle and sent wrenching stabs of pain shooting through her body.

The stirrup was banging a tattoo against the pony's sleek flank, while Vera failed repeatedly in her desperate efforts to regain it. Once her toe made connections, but could not keep the momentary advantage. Pete, temporarily abandoning his walking beam effect, was now sunfishing. Vera's eyes were blurred, her head in a whirl; her muscles ached from the strain of trying to curb this animated cyclone beneath her.

"Darn—you—Pete. Behave—can't you!" The words came forth jerkily, punctuated by Pete's crazed contortions.

Then her toe actually caught the elusive stirrup, just as she was beginning to think that the dangers of being thrown were preferable to a further continuation of such torture. A quick thrust sent her slim foot into the loop, and the girl settled down to fight Pete in dead earnest, now with at least an even chance.

But her tanned face grew pale, and a gasp of dismay escaped her lips as she felt something slide up tight about her ankle.

What had happened was the worst that can befall the rider of a fractious broncho. The heel of the girl's trim riding boot had failed to hook the bottom of the stirrup ring, and her whole foot had slipped through, to become fast wedged.

Persons unfamiliar with the cowboy's trade may smile at his high-heeled boots, but the heels of a cowpoke's boots are strictly utilitarian, designed to prevent the catastrophe Vera Willis now faced. The rider unlucky enough to be thrown when thus anchored to his cayuse is doomed to a horrible death beneath the pounding hoofs.

SUCH was the fate that awaited Vera—and all too well did she know it. Yet there was one alternative.

"I've—got—to—k-kill you—Pete!" she whispered. Her hand reached swiftly back to draw the pistol from its sheath on her belt. A bullet between the ears would bring Pete down before he threw and dragged her.

But Vera's groping fingers closed on empty space above the holster! Her weapon was gone—jolted loose by the violence of Pete's wild bucking.

The cayuse squealed, again pointing his forefeet toward the stars, while Vera, now helpless, fought for mastery. Down he came, head between his legs, this change of position accomplished so quickly that the rider, handicapped as she was, could not shift herself in time to meet it.

Pete's next upward plunge catapulted his young mistress into the air, clear of the saddle save for the one stirrup that held her left foot in a vice-like grip.

Suddenly a horseman was beside her, coming apparently from nowhere. A

strong arm circled her waist. Another seized the flying reins, and snapped Pete to earth with a ruthless yank that restored the demoralized cayuse to sanity. He stood stock still, trembling.

"Easy, ma'am. Twist that foot a bit and we'll have it free." The voice was pleasant, characterized by the soft, slurring inflection typical of so many men in the great southwest.

For an instant Vera relaxed in his arms, dazed by the abruptness of this unexpected rescue when all hope seemed gone. Her eyes were closed, her head against the chest of the rider who had come so opportunely; she could feel the steady pulsations of his heart.

"Keeled over, eh!" she heard him mutter. "No wonder. It was one close shave. Gosh, but she's pretty!"

Then Vera came back to reality with a little gulp of indignation, for two lips had brushed gently against her cheek. A quick, lithe twist freed her from the puncher's embrace; he did not strive to hold her, and the girl slid down the flank of his pony till her feet rested again on solid ground. An angry flush mantled her face with crimson; it made Vera all the more attractive, though of this she was unaware.

"You didn't have to do that, did you?" she demanded.

He grinned infectiously at her, no wise abashed.

"Why, I reckon I did, since you ask. You looked so dawgoned inviting, ma'am, that I just had to help myself. Shucks, don't you reckon I'm human?"

Vera tried to hold her pose of injured indignation, but there was something so appealing in the twinkling blue eyes which smiled down on her that the effort failed rather dismally. The frown changed to a smile, and a dimple flashed briefly on her smooth cheek.

"That sure is better," he said approvingly, and his grin broadened to disclose a row of firm white teeth. "I didn't figure you'd stay mad at me very long."

"At least I'm a lot obliged for your help," Vera told him. "Another ten seconds and it would have been hearts and flowers for me." She spoke lightly, yet beneath the words was an undercurrent of seriousness. One cannot wholly laugh off so close an approach to eternity.

Vera stepped around to his far side, taking Pete, who acted properly ashamed of himself, by the bridle. "I guess my cayuse is tamed now. A hornet stung him in the ear, and he went loco so sudden I didn't have a fighting chance."

Her eyes rested on the stranger's horse; it was a sorrel, the right hip marked by a conspicuous blotch of white. And he wore bat-wing chaps as well.

"YOUR name's Dave Hollister, isn't it?" Somehow she knew her rescuer could be no one else.

"That's correct, ma'am. And yours, I reckon, is Vera Willis. I heard J. B.'s daughter had come back from the east. Now I've had the privilege of seeing you I'm certainly glad you didn't stay away any longer. I'd be bold to assert that your presence is the one thing this country needs to make it perfect."

"Indeed!" Vera said dryly. "Thanks so much for the pretty speech—you're rather a fast worker, aren't you?"

"Oh, I can show speed when I have to," he chuckled, and Vera recalled the sure swiftness displayed when Hollister had saved her from certain death. In the light of what she owed this

man her remark seemed flippant. To cover a momentary embarrassment she swung gracefully to the saddle, wondering if Hollister had noticed her interest in his horse and personal equipment.

"Going to rush off, Miss Willis? Pshaw now, that's too bad. Just when we're starting to get acquainted."

"It's about time I drifted back toward the ranch," she rejoined.

"Day's young yet. How 'bout a little ride to enjoy the scenery? Folks speak well of it hereabouts."

"Not this time." Yet Vera softened the refusal by speaking in friendly tones. "But if you wish you may ride part way home with me?"

"*Part* way? My goodness, ma'am! Do you think I ought to?"

Vera bit her lip in mortification, realizing that Dave Hollister was poking fun at her; realizing, too, how ungenerous it was not to invite him to the ranch, there to receive the thanks of J. B. himself. Yet how could she? Willis strongly suspected Hollister of stealing Circle Star cattle; and if the man in bat-wing chaps whom Vera had seen secretly branding calves was not Dave, then who could it be? The white-faced sorrel was added evidence against him.

"Guess mebby I don't rate very high with your dad, Miss Willis," Hollister observed, and Vera gave a guilty start at finding how closely his mental processes paralleled hers. "What's he say about me?" A quizzical grin lurked in the corners of Hollister's lips. "Shoot the works. I reckon I can stand it."

"You're asking for it, cowboy, so don't blame me. Here goes. Dad seems to think that your cows are—er—unusually prolific for run of the range stock."

"Prolific!" he echoed admiringly. "Wow! That's a six-bit word. I aim to try it on an unprepared world myself some day." Then more soberly, though his eyes still danced their merry twinkle, "About those she dogies of mine—I've noticed they've been working overtime. Now I'm trying to figure out a scheme so they'll have their offspring in litters, same as a jack rabbit.

"But, coming back to more important matters, Miss Willis. Riding even a little ways in your company is a sight better than nothing. My motto is to take what I can—and be thankful."

So they started off together, quite like old friends. Vera found herself speaking of her eastern experiences, to which he proved an interested listener. Calves were not mentioned. Vera, in spite of instinctive prejudices against cattle rustlers, had to admit that young Dave Hollister ranked high.

"He's more of a *man* than any one I met back east," she thought. Then they circled a buffalo berry thicket to encounter a cow and calf. The cow was marked with a Circle Star, while her progeny had somewhere acquired an O Bar O! Vera's eyes did not miss this damaging discrepancy. Involuntarily she pulled up her horse; Dave Hollister did likewise.

"Now that's peculiar, ain't it, ma'am?" he observed, bending a sardonic glance on the cow and calf. "Them brands don't jibe worth a cent. How do you account for it?"

"Looks like carelessness to me," Vera replied, her brain a tumult of conflicting emotions. What a situation! To meet a man under such romantic and appealing circumstances—only to be deluged by a flood of evidence that he was guilty of stealing cattle from her own father!

"Careless don't half express it!" Hollister drawled. "What would you recommend a fella to do about it?"

"If I were you," said Vera, "I'd haze those two critters so far apart that the calf would never see his mammy again."

Her foot slipped through the stirrup. Another buck, and she would be beneath the flying hoofs

"It's sound advice," Dave assured her gravely, "which the same I reckon I better follow."

A GRAY roadster was parked in front of the Circle Star ranch house when Vera reached home that afternoon, proof that Frank Davenport was calling. Davenport served as local manager of a stamp mill some miles distant, and since Vera's return from the east he had been a steady visitor at her father's ranch.

She intuitively recognized Frank's feelings toward her, uncertain whether to be glad or sorry. She was certain she liked him.

He was an agreeable companion, thoughtful and considerate of her. She could not help but enjoy his society. Yet as for love—Vera's thoughts grew troubled and uncertain.

"I don't believe I really love him," she mused again and again. "I wish I knew."

Now and then—once especially when they rode together under the glorious magic of a golden moon—she had been conscious of a sudden flood of tenderness for Frank. Almost was Vera ready to believe herself in love. Later the feeling passed, and she attributed it to the bewitching influence of moonlight. What she would say to Davenport when he finally proposed was still a problem of the future.

Now, as Vera came from the stables she passed close by an open window of the house. Frank and her father were talking; the girl heard her own name mentioned and paused.

"Vera's a girl in a million," Daven-

port was saying. "But I'd like your approval before the thing goes farther. Any objections to me, Mr. Willis?"

"Um," J. B. muttered. "Objections? Why I don't know, Frank. No very serious ones, I guess. Course I hate the thought of losing Vera I missed her when she was away, and now she's back I kinda hoped I'd have her to myself for a spell. Done pretty well in the mining game, Frank?"

"Well enough so I can't kick. Don't think much of it, do you?"

"Not a lot. I'd rather see Vera marry a cattleman, for all the business has its ups and downs. Naturally I know she's got to marry some time."

"Suppose I went into cattle?" Davenport said slowly.

"What do you mean?" The quick way Willis spoke showed his keen interest.

"Why, I've got about twenty-five thousand dollars salted down. I'd like nothing better than to buy an interest in your ranch. Then we could all be together."

"Said anything to Vera?"

"Not yet. I thought it only square to speak to you first."

"All right, my boy. I won't stand in your way. Now it's up to the girl. If she says yes, God bless you! As to going in with me, we'll let that ride till later."

Vera slipped past the window, not waiting to hear more.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "Now I know Frank will propose in a hurry, with dad's encouragement. I don't want him to." And somehow, as she went to her room, willful thoughts went straying back to Dave Hollister. "I'm an awful little fool, I guess," she mused, "but I can't help liking Dave, even after meeting him only once. I—I like him better than Frank already. What a mess everything is! A rustler! And bat-wing chaps besides! Poor dad! I'm afraid—"

DAVENPORT stayed on to dinner, of course. It was Vera's father who brought up the subject of calf stealing.

"I've pretty near got the hombre cold," he stated. "All I need is definite proof, and I'll smash him like an egg shell."

Vera's heart began pounding. She had the proof her father lacked!

Davenport accepted a cigar his host extended. "Meaning that chap over Wildcat Creek way?" he asked.

The old stockman nodded grimly.

"And I'm wondering, Frank, if there isn't a connection between my losses and yours."

Davenport's eyes narrowed; his glance was a question.

"When did those gold shipment holdups start? Not till after Sandy McPherson sold out. Right?"

"Check!" said Davenport. "I hadn't looked at the matter from that slant before, but you're correct."

"They's something phony about Hollister," Willis pursued. "And about his place. Won't let anybody inside the house. Some of my boys have been over there. Looks like he's got reasons for being mighty secretive. We don't know who he is nor where he came from."

"I saw Hollister snooping around the stamp mill one evening," Davenport said. "That's nothing much against him, of course; nothing that could be used, I mean."

"Might be he's in cahoots with one of your men," Willis went on. "Somebody that tipped him off when a shipment was going out. What description did Ed Peters give?" Peters was

the man who had driven the treasure car.

"The robber was masked pretty well. But from what Ed reported he was about Hollister's size and build."

"So of course Hollister must be guilty!" Vera declared ironically, breaking into the conversation.

Her dad turned on her in surprise. "What you all excited about?" he asked mildly. "What is it to you if he is guilty of a flock of crimes?"

To which Davenport added, smiling: "Not a friend of yours, Vera, I hope?"

"Don't be absurd!" she told them. "But it sounds to me like giving a dog a bad name and then hanging him."

"It may be hanging, before we're through with the jasper," Willis grumbled.

To Vera's relief, Frank Davenport left early that evening; she had dreaded being left alone with him.

"You didn't act very cordial to Frank," her father remarked, as they sat for a time before going to bed. "Don't you like him?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Vera replied. "After a fashion." She wanted to ask about Dave Hollister, but dared not say anything that might arouse suspicions as to her interest in a man whose reputation seemed so questionable.

"I don't believe Dave held up the Hidden Fortune car," she thought, "whatever else he's done. He didn't deny about the calf—when the chance offered. Perhaps he thought there was no use denying after what I'd seen. Some things you can't well explain."

"Frank thinks a lot of you," Willis spoke up. "I'm not keen to lose you, Vera, but it's bound to come some time. I want you to get the right man."

"I know, dad; you're a dear. But —it's so hard to be sure." She was thinking of Hollister as she spoke, comparing his personality with Davenport's. This cowboy-ranchman, rustler, outlaw—whatever he was—appealed to her fancy far more than did Frank.

"I owe my life to him," Vera mused soberly. "If Dave Hollister hadn't come along when he did I'd be dead now."

She told her father nothing of the day's adventures.

NEXT morning Vera saddled Pete and rode off toward Navaho Peak, hoping that fate might bring another encounter with Hollister. Shep, a mongrel collie, elected to accompany her.

"And if I happen to meet a friend, Shep," Vera said sternly, "you mustn't tell dad on me." Shep woofed a couple of times to reassure her, and off they went.

She rode through the region where the calves had been branded the previous day, but saw neither calves nor brander. She found the spot, however, where the fire had burned, and paused for a moment. This was not far from Wildcat Creek. The old McPherson place, now owned by Dave Hollister, lay some half dozen miles farther south.

Vera rode on.

Shep ranged the country as they proceeded. Presently he began a querulous, excited barking off to one side. Vera called and whistled, but Shep refused to come, keeping up his noise.

"Probably got some animal cornered in the rocks," the girl thought, and turned her horse in that direction to investigate.

Shep, she perceived, was tugging at an object thrust into a narrow crevice

where a granite ledge had cracked. He wagged his tail in acknowledgment of Vera's arrival, and went at the task with renewed vigor.

"What is it, old fellow?" she demanded, dismounting from her horse. Shep triumphantly dragged forth a pair of rolled up chaps, shaking and worrying them furiously.

"Drop it!" was her sharp command. They were leather chaps, of the bat-wing variety, soft and in good condition: evidently recently worn. Vera shook her head, not a little perturbed. Why should any rider abandon good equipment in this way? The only reason she could think of brought disagreeable conclusions—thoughts she did not like to face.

She rolled the chaps up again, restoring them to their hiding place discovered by the dog's keen nose. Shep did not approve; Vera's command to follow her was obeyed unwillingly.

"We're going home now, Shep," she said.

Over near the base of Navaho Peak whom should they meet but Dave Hollister on his white-splashed sorrel!

"This is sure my lucky day, Miss Willis," he said, removing his Stetson with a flourish. But Vera was staring at his legs, incased in long-haired pants.

"I—I thought you always wore bat-wing chaps," she asserted, hardly realizing how abrupt a greeting that was. He seemed surprised, perhaps even a trifle concerned, at the remark.

"Sometimes, not always. Since meeting you yesterday I've sworn off. You see, I heard as how J. B. Willis don't like the looks of 'em. Being's I cherish the desire to win his good opinion, I've changed my style. I'm hoping both you and your dad will approve."

"My dog located a pair of bat-wing chaps hidden in the rocks." Vera found the words coming almost of their own volition. "They looked like the ones you wore yesterday."

"That's curious now, ain't it?" Hollister commented. He did not deny ownership, nor offer any explanations. Vera looked at him, her eyes clouded. She did so want to believe in Dave Hollister, to be convinced that he was innocent of the sinister things charged against him, but she found it hard sledding to keep her faith alive. He must realize some at least of the thoughts in her mind—yet he did nothing, said nothing, to help her.

"Tell your dad about that cow and calf we saw?" he casually queried.

"No," said Vera.

"U-m!" said Dave. "P'raps just as well he didn't know."

Vera could have stamped her foot. He was so nonchalant, as if the whole thing amounted to a mere trifle.

"I must be going on now," after a few minutes in his company. Really Vera wished to stay longer with Dave; to leave required an effort of her will. "Good by, Mr. Hollister." Her voice was stiff, as if to give a hint that he had not quite come up to her expectations. Of this Dave appeared blandly unconscious.

"Good by, Miss Willis," said he. "Been a pleasure to see you again. I'm hoping for an encore soon. Some day when feeling right bold I aim to ride over to the Circle Star and beard the lion. I'll leave my bat-wing chaps to home."

"HELL'S popping again!" was the curt greeting John Willis gave his daughter on her return.

"What now, dad?" Vera gasped, sensing serious news.

"Another Hidden Fortune holdup. This is the worst so far. Ed Peters was killed."

"When did it happen?" Instinctively Vera's thoughts flew to Dave Hollister. The road over which gold shipments from the mine were transported ran within two miles of Navaho Peak, the section where she had met him.

"To-day. This morning some time. Frank Davenport's a damned fool to send Peters over that road without an armed guard. Anything like this is bad for his record. A hombre waited in the rocks where the trail goes through Black Pass, and shot Ed at the wheel. Then he took the gold and shifted pronto. They found the shell ejected from his gun. It was a 30-30 Winchester. Didn't leave any tracks to follow, but I expect they'll get him."

Vera felt her face grow pale. She had noted a rifle in a scabbard, slung to Dave's saddle. Why did so much damaging circumstantial evidence have to pile up on him?

"Have they—do they suspect any one?" Her voice remained calm, despite her inner turmoil.

"No more than the other times, I reckon. Suspicions mebby, but no proof. Nobody saw the job pulled. But I know." His inference was clear.

"Excuse me for butting in, Mr. Willis." The speaker was one Dan Harvey, a member of the Circle Star outfit, who now approached them. "I saw that shooting over in Black Pass."

"You did!" Willis cried, astonished. "How come?"

"Well, I didn't exactly see it done, but I saw the party responsible. I was on a point of rock south of the pass, and I noticed Ed's car traveling along the road in a cloud of dust. When it went into the gap I lost track of it; but then I wondered why the bus didn't come back into view. A few minutes later a man rode away from there, traveling fast and heading toward the Navaho Peak country. He was the guy that salivated Peters."

"What did he look like?" Willis demanded sharply.

"Why, he was pretty far off, you understand, and not really suspecting anything wrong I didn't pay particular attention. I did notice he wore bat-wing chaps."

"And the horse?"

"Sorrel. A blotch of white on the hip. Looked like that cayuse Dave Hollister rides."

"Why didn't you report this sooner, Dan?"

"I only just got back to headquarters, Mr. Willis," defensively. "And I never knew what had happened till the boys told me."

"I get you. But Davenport will want this information. You better ride over to the mill right away. If he's there tell him he can have as many of my men as he wants for a posse."

"O. K., boss," and Harvey left.

Vera could hardly look at her father, knowing what he believed; that this proved Hollister guilty of murder in addition to the other crimes charged against him. Desperately she thought back over her meeting with Dave. How long was that after the killing and holdup? Could Dave have worn the bat-wing chaps she found, and then put on different ones, in case some one might have seen him riding from the scene of the crime? And why had he seemed bothered at her reference to the Angora chaps?

"I *can't* believe Dave killed Peters," she mused wretchedly.

Willis went off muttering under his breath.

The afternoon dragged slowly, Vera afflicted by a thousand worries, her thoughts constantly of Dave Hollister and the web in which he was entangled. She was suddenly frightened to find how much he meant to her, guilty or not.

It was after five when Vera's thoughts turned again to the hidden bat-wing chaps. If they really belonged to Dave, would he not remove them on learning of their chance discovery? This idea suddenly assumed vital importance in the girl's mind. If they were gone, she told herself, Dave was, in all probability, guilty; if not, she could still cling to a hope that the circumstantial evidence against him was false.

"I've got to find out," she reasoned. "I've *got* to." Physical action would be a relief, far preferable to the deadliness of waiting.

Hastily Vera threw a saddle on Pete and started across country toward the region beyond Navaho Peak. She had a little difficulty in locating the particular ledge of granite. At last, however, success crowned her search. It was the spot beyond doubt, as shown by the scratches made where Shep's claws dug the earth as he tugged at his find.

But the bat-wing chaps were gone!

A leaden weight settled down on Vera's spirit. Somehow she had convinced herself that the chaps would be undisturbed; to find her hopes dashed was a cruel blow. The sun was setting when she started Pete slowly homeward, and the deepening dusk matched the dull despair within her.

It was quite dark before she covered half the distance home. Of a sudden she pulled Pete in, listening, alarmed. From a distance came the thud of hoofbeats as horsemen swept along, riding at a fast and furious pace. Who were these unseen riders of the night?

Involuntarily Vera shivered, straining her ears to hear the final sounds that marked the passage of galloping ponies.

"Come on, Pete," she whispered. "Let's be getting home. I'm beginning to be afraid."

The ranch buildings appeared deserted when Vera arrived; a lamp glowed faintly in the bunkhouse, but otherwise the entire place was dark. She entered the living room and struck a lamp, bothered by her father's absence. *Who were those riders she had heard?*

A scrap of paper on the writing desk caught her attention; dark spots of crimson stained it, and when Vera bent close she uttered a stifled gasp of horror—the spots were blood!

The girl's horror increased as she read:

> Dave Hollister did it. I had the goods on him, but he beat me to iron. I know I'm a goner, boys. Get the cuss for me. DAN.

Vera's knees tottered beneath her. Half fainting, she clutched at the desk for support, the meaning of this dreadful message all too clear. Harvey had been shot, the paper found by his lifeless body. The men who rode through the night were her father and his cowboys, gone to exact a bitter vengeance for the murder of their comrade!

Again Vera's eyes took in the blood-stained paper. A new thought now occurred to the girl; eagerly she glanced over the desk, poking here and there among the odds and ends that littered it. At last she found what she was looking for.

A moment later Vera was outdoors, mounted on Pete, heading at full speed for Dave Hollister's ranch, far away on Wildcat Creek. And as she raced madly along under the soft glow of the low-hanging stars her lips were moving in prayer.

"Dear God," she begged, "don't fail me now. Let me get there before it is too late!"

THE ride seemed endless, a nightmare of awful uncertainty; and above it all was the sickening fear in Vera's mind that she was doomed to failure. The Circle Star riders had had so long a start! They must have left the ranch at least an hour before she did. The girl crowded Pete ruthlessly, heedless of the danger that ever lurked in dog or badger holes. Save for the rare event of hornet stings, her cayuse was a reliable, stanch, sure-footed little brute, and to his sagacious instinct Vera trusted.

It was a lonely country through which she rode, but Vera's mind had other things to dwell on than the forbidding wilderness surrounding her on all sides. Hideous pictures of what might soon be happening at Dave Hollister's ranch danced before her eyes; she visioned stern, implacable faces scowling at a helpless captive—a rope—the branch of a convenient tree.

"He saved my life," she murmured brokenly. "I've got to save his!"

It was only a day before that she had met Dave Hollister for the first time; twenty-four hours—and so much had happened. To her it seemed more like a year, packed with events of momentous import.

"Faster, Pete, faster!" she cried. On they went, Pete's hoofs drumming briskly on the hard, sun-baked ground.

Then above the rhythmic pound Vera caught the quick tread of a second horse; before she knew it a rider had materialized out of the darkness, less than a score of paces distant, cutting across to head her off.

"Hold up there!" he called harshly. With a gasp of relief she recognized Davenport's voice; his sharp challenge carried a veiled threat.

"Don't shoot, Frank! It's Vera."

"Good Lord, Vera!" he grunted in obvious astonishment. "What you doing way out here this time of night? I darned near turned a gun on you, thinking I had a chance at the hombre that killed Ed Peters this morning." He spurred close to her.

"I'm heading for Hollister's place, Frank," Vera said breathlessly. "Dad and the boys have gone to hang him for shooting Dan Harvey."

"Dan shot!" Frank Davenport echoed. "That makes two good men gone in one day! Guess likely a hanging's called for."

"Come with me, Frank! If we hurry there may be time to save him!"

"I'll come with you all right," Davenport assented. "This is no sort of country for a girl to travel alone at night. But we're heading for the Circle Star, not Wildcat Creek."

"No! I'm not going home—not yet. Please, Frank, help me see this through."

"Now look here, Vera," said Davenport soothingly; "you're all upset, and no wonder. I don't blame you for feeling as you do, but Hollister's ranch isn't a place where you ought to be tonight. Your dad's got an unpleasant chore to do. You'll only be making a tough job harder."

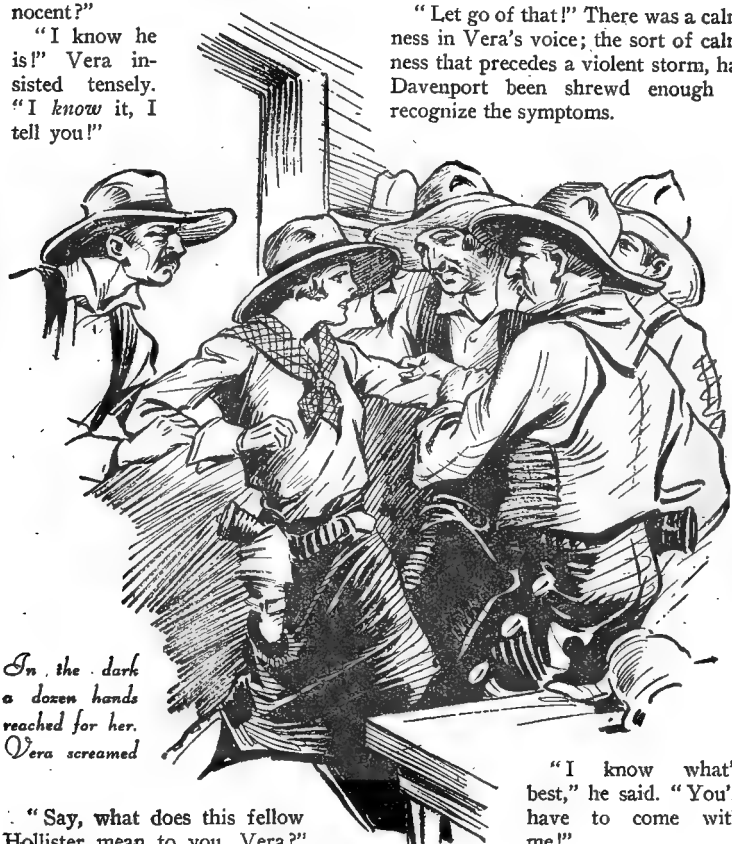
"Frank, you don't understand!" Her voice was shrill in the still cool air of the silent night. "Dave didn't kill Dan Harvey!"

"I don't know anything about that, but your dad must have pretty good grounds for what he's got in mind. Why do you think Hollister's innocent?"

"I know he is!" Vera insisted tensely. "I *know* it, I tell you!"

"No! And you're not going either! Your dad wouldn't thank me for letting you." His hand reached forth to seize the rein of her bridle.

"Let go of that!" There was a calmness in Vera's voice; the sort of calmness that precedes a violent storm, had Davenport been shrewd enough to recognize the symptoms.



In the dark a dozen hands reached for her. Vera screamed

"Say, what does this fellow Hollister mean to you, Vera?" Davenport demanded, his voice suddenly altered. "There's something to this. You been meeting him without your dad knowing it?" Frank's tone had an ugly suspicious ring.

"Only twice," for Vera saw that he scented a possible rival. "Won't you come with me, Frank?"

"I know what's best," he said. "You'll have to come with me!"

"You can't stop me!" It was the girl's tone that now carried a sharp edge of suspicion. "You want them to hang Dave Hollister! That's wicked, Frank; unworthy of any decent man!" She could see his motive—the desire to have a rival removed at any cost. "Let me go, I tell you!" Tightly gripped in

Vera's right hand was her riding quirt.

"You're coming with me!" Davenport spoke flatly, as if decided to have his way by force since other appeals had failed.

Then Vera struck with all her strength, the quirt wrapping about his bare wrist with a vicious crack.

Davenport had expected nothing of the sort. "Vera!" he gasped. "Don't do that!" In spite of the savage blow his hand still held the rein.

Vera jerked free her lash, to swing furiously at his unprotected face. She was sobbing now, on the verge of hysterics, hardly knowing what she did, but determined to carry on. She felt the hard braided leather cut Frank's cheek. Again she struck, panting, and again. With an oath Davenport dropped the bridle to cover his eyes from the searing bite of those terrible blows.

VERA seized the advantage thus afforded her. The quirt landed on Pete's flank, and before Frank Davenport could recover himself the girl was a dozen paces away, traveling like an arrow. A jab of the spurs sent his own mount in prompt pursuit.

Vera, shuddering at the recollection of what she had done, bent low in the saddle; it was an awful thing to do—to quirt a friend in the face.

"It wasn't my fault!" she sobbed. "I had to do it. He wouldn't let me go." And, in appeal to her cayuse, "Come on, Pete! Show the stuff in you, boy. He mustn't catch us."

After a time Vera glanced to the rear, dreading lest the faint starlight disclose Davenport close behind her. He was not to be seen. Evidently she had already increased the lead gained by her prompt action with the riding quirt. Pete was an unusually speedy cayuse; furthermore, Frank's weight would be an added handicap.

However, just to make certain of throwing the pursuer off her trail, Vera turned sharply to the right and dashed up a shallow coulee. When she finally straightened out for Hollister's ranch she was a half mile west of the route followed previously. She had outwitted Davenport, with no fear now that he would stop her. But the encounter had cost Vera fifteen minutes of precious time, when time meant life and death.

On and on she went, Pete cleaving the air like a living thunderbolt; on and on, till at last Vera found her faithful cayuse sliding down the steep slope into Wildcat Cañon. He would have stopped to drink at the creek when they forded it, but Vera urged him forward. The buildings of the old McPherson place were just ahead, around the next bend.

No signs of life there could be seen; no lights at the windows; no cluster of saddled ponies, nothing.

It seemed impossible that she should have beaten her father and his riders to the spot, and deathly fear stabbed at her heart—fear that they had come, accomplished their evil purpose, and gone. Slowly she drew near, with a shuddering glance at the trees before the house, looking for the dreadful evidence which would prove her worst fears realized; thankful that the starlight showed no human pendulum, dangling hideously.

Vera slipped from her horse, approaching the front portion of the house. There she hesitated. Not a sound was to be heard; even customary noises of the night seemed strangely stilled. She tried the door. To her astonishment it swung open at a touch.

After another instant of hesitation she entered.

Then, without warning, a dozen hands came clutching out of the darkness; silent figures leaped from all sides, bearing her to the floor. In the awful shock of this cruel surprise a piercing shriek left Vera's lips—a scream of mortal terror.

"Good God!" she heard John Willis shout above the confusion. "Easy, boys! That's a girl. It's my Vera!" Whereupon, for the first time in all her life, Vera Willis passed completely out in a dead faint.

WHEN consciousness returned Vera found herself lying on a cot in what was apparently the living room of Hollister's ranch house. A lamp now burned on the table. She sat up, recognizing familiar figures: her father, cowboys of the Circle Star spread, and Frank Davenport, who had arrived a few minutes after her.

"O. K. now?" Willis asked.

"Yes," said Vera. "I guess so."

"You should never have come here to-night," Willis went on, his voice stern. "Frank's told me how he tried to stop you. He was right. And that was a nasty slashing you gave him with the quirt."

Vera glanced at Davenport's wrist and face, scored by ugly red welts.

"I'm sorry, Frank," she said humbly. "Honest I am. But I warned you not to stop me."

"You were plumb crazy," Willis grumbled. "What got into you, Vera, to do such a fool stunt? Is this Hollister a friend of yours?"

"Yes," she rejoined, heedless that her father's cowboys were staring curiously. "He is a friend—and I like him."

"Fine business, taking up on the quiet with a rustler and murderer—the man who shot down one of the best cowpokes that ever forked a broncho."

"Stop!" Vera cried passionately. She understood now a part of what had happened. Hollister was away when the posse came, and they had broken in to await his return; in the darkness their mistaking her for him was only natural.

"What d'you mean stop?" Willis demanded angrily. "What I said was the truth."

"It was not!" Vera faced her irate sire fearlessly. "Dave Hollister never fired the bullet that killed Dan Harvey."

"Yeah? Suppose you prove it!"

"I *will* prove it! That's why I came. Here's what you call proof of Dave's guilt, isn't it?" She produced the blood-spotted paper found on her father's desk at the Circle Star ranch.

"Proof enough," Willis stated. "Proof to hang that skunk when we get him."

"Dan Harvey didn't write it. The paper was planted on his body by the real murderer to frame an innocent man."

"Eh? What's that you say, Vera?" Willis was all attention now. Up to the present it was plain that he had not taken his daughter's assertions seriously. "How d'you figure Dan didn't write it?"

"Not difficult to prove," Vera said coolly. "You could have checked up for yourself if you hadn't been in such a hurry to hang a man." Her voice was faintly bitter—accusing. "Here's the receipt Dan signed for his pay when you settled with the boys the first of last month." She handed over a second bit of paper. "Notice the

capital D's in the two names Dave and Dan. Did the same man write both these signatures?"

Willis compared the papers, holding them close to the lamp. When he looked up his face was sober.

"You win, Vera! Guess I'm pretty much of a headstrong fool. You've saved me doing something I'd have regretted all my life. The man who wrote this killed Dan Harvey. Mebby Peters too. Who was it?"

"Howdy, gents?" a cool voice broke in. "You been expecting me?" and Dave Hollister appeared, coming no one knew from where. Certainly he had not entered the house by way of the outside door. Willis and the others stared blankly.

"How'd you get here?" the ranchman snapped.

"A foxy coyote usually has two holes leading to his burrow," Hollister said with a dry chuckle. "I fixed this joint the same, thinking it might come in handy. When I arrived and saw they was company here, I used the—er—other way."

"How long you been in the house?" was Willis's next demand.

"Long enough to hear Miss Vera wipe my slate clear of one black mark, anyway. I'm obliged to you, ma'am, for your friendly interest," and he bowed to the girl, who had remained speechless with surprise.

"But who killed Dan Harvey?" Willis pursued. "That's what I crave to know." He fumbled with the stained paper found by Dan's corpse. "This is evidence to hang some man—who?"

SUDDENLY Vera spoke.

"Look! Look at him!" she gasped, her arm leveled toward Davenport. "No wonder he didn't want me to come!" Ashen-faced, Frank was stealthily edging nearer the door. "He did it! Make him show his handwriting!" Then, her voice rising to a shrill scream, "Quick! Stop him!"

Frank had leaped for the door, his gun blazing as he jumped—harmlessly, for the nearest cowboy struck the muzzle up, and its leaden pill thudded into Dave Hollister's ceiling. The next instant Davenport, swearing and struggling impotently, was a helpless prisoner. One rider secured his pistol; two others held him, each by an arm.

Malevolently John Willis eyed the man who had so basely abused his friendship.

"I can't understand it," he muttered under his breath. "You're the last fellow I'd have suspected, Frank. You don't look like a human skunk, but by the eternal you are one—pizen mean at that. What was the idea?"

Now Davenport was more cool and nonchalant than any other man in the room. His air was one of defiant bravado—a sort of last minute courage in the face of certain ruin.

"What the hell's the use of talking about it?" he rasped harshly. "You've got me, haven't you? If it's details you want—ask *him*," nodding toward Hollister. "*He* knows, damn him!"

"It's one rotten yarn," Dave said, in answer to Willis's unspoken question. "He shot Ed Peters before salivating Dan. That last could have been prevented if I'd known in time. Incidentally, it was Davenport slapped my brand on a jag of your calves, Mr. Willis."

The ranchman goggled owlishly on hearing this astounding disclosure.

"*Your* brand *on* my calves? Why would the pole-cat do that?"

"So I'd be put out of the way with

a rope or a bullet. Once dead I'd be a safe goat to hang the holdups on."

"Well, I will be damned!" Willis declared piously. "But why was he so keen to have you salivated?"

"He was beginning to get wise, I reckon, though I'd tried to play my cards careful. To start way back at the headwaters, Davenport has been looting the Hidden Fortune mine for a spell of moons. The Lord alone knows how much he's got away with, though it was plenty. Them two holdups were only part of it, faked between him and the driver, who split the booty with his boss. But the last one was no fake, and I bet Peters never suspicioned what was coming. Frank killed him to shut his mouth. Most likely Ed had been trying to shake Davenport down for a bigger split.

"The thing started long before the robberies. Frank had been sending doctored reports east, making out that the ore was running lower grade, which was way off the genuine facts. The difference between what he got and what his reports showed went into his own jeans. It was a plumb dangerous game, because the stockholders might have sent on an expert to look the mess over. But that would have tipped Davenport. What they wanted to do was catch him with the goods, if crooked work was going on.

"One of these Easterners stopped last summer at my ranch up in Colorado, and in the course of our palavering he mentioned this mine, stating his suspicions. I happen to be a mining man as well as a rancher, with some knowledge of assaying and so on. The upshot of it was that they made it worth my while to come down here for an investigation on the q. t. from the outside. I rigged me a laboratory in the old cyclone cellar, where I ran tests on samples I sneaked from the Hidden Fortune ore carts. I don't know just when Davenport first smelled a rat, but anyway he did."

"And Frank wore bat-wing chaps, hoping you'd get the blame for his dirty work," Vera interrupted. "Those I found were his, not yours. But what about that sorrel he rode—the one with the white blotch on its hip?"

"The white was flour, easy to put on and easy to take off," Dave told her.

Davenport yawned ostentatiously.

"Having got the post-mortems all settled," said he, "what you going to do next? It was a good racket while it lasted and she nearly worked to the finish. I missed on some of the breaks. But what a sap I was to write the note, putting my turkey tracks down on paper! That queered the chances. Funny, ain't it, the fool things a man will do sometimes?"

"I liked you once, Frank," Willis said. "I was a bigger fool than you to be taken in so easy—I reckon you know you'll hang for murder."

Davenport shook his head. A smile curled his lips as he faced them, a smile that was really a sneer of contemptuous defiance, as if they had no power to harm him. Vera, regarding him, breathless, sensed tragedy in the air.

"You're wrong, John. I won't—"

The words were never finished. Frank Davenport abruptly pitched forward; would have fallen to the floor save for the two men who held him firmly by the arms.

"Good gosh!" one of the cowpokes ejaculated. "The hombre's gone dead on us!"

Davenport *was* dead. Hollister bent over, sniffing at his mouth.

"Cyanide of potassium," he said. "They use it in their reduction process at the stamp mill. Been carrying a dose

around with him, I judge, in case his plans went sour all at once. That stuff sure works fast. Davenport's cheated Johnny Law."

VERA WILLIS and Dave Hollister were standing close together under the friendly stars that smiled down on them. The hours of horror and anxiety had passed, leaving her at peace. She was happy, despite the recent tragedies.

"I ought to scold you for one thing, Dave," Vera whispered. "It was a terrible blow to me when we saw that cow and calf. I went on home half sick. You might have told me then."

"Why now," Dave drawled reprovingly, "you know you never really thought I ran an iron on any of your dad's stock. Did you, Vera?"

"Well, not exactly," she rejoined shyly. "But you didn't do much to help my faith keep up."

"I didn't dare. I knew you and your dad were seeing Davenport every day or so, and they was a big risk he'd get wise if either of you had the facts. I was having plenty trouble sinking the hooks in that hombre as it was."

They were silent for a moment; then Dave said, his voice husky:

"It was a mighty fine, plucky thing for you to take that ride in the dark when you figured I was in danger. Why'd you do it, Vera?"

He waited for her answer, which somehow did not come.

"I reckon I know the reason; anyway I been hoping I did. Listen, honey, we ain't known each other very long. It's less'n thirty-six hours since I saw you in a jam with your Pete hoss. But shucks! Hours don't count sometimes. Seems to me like I'd known you always—and loved you for years. Could you take a lifelong chance on me, honey, for better or for worse?"

"I've been waiting to hear you say that, Dave," Vera told him softly. "And wanting you to say it, too. But it wouldn't be a chance, dear. I'd be betting on a sure thing. Yesterday I said you were a fast worker, Dave. I —I think I like fast workers."

Nothing could have been faster than the way Dave had her in his arms; nor the way he kissed her, taking her lips as though he never meant to let them go.

Derry was genuinely startled. How like she was to Robin!

The Strangest Heritage

With the regaining of her rightful wealth, Robin finds herself heiress also to a fateful heritage

By Marthe Neville

Author of "Mad Marriage"

NEWS of her father's death places Robin Brent, heiress to his fortune, on board a liner bound for the United States. Robin, young and innocent, is easy prey for unscrupulous Lydia Craven, who, when a collision sinks the great liner, steals Robin's passport and papers and gets into the United States as the heiress.

Robin is saved by Derry Conway, who is madly in love with her, and they plan to oust the pseudo heiress and establish the girl's true identity. But until that can be effected Robin takes a position as companion to rich Mrs. Stewart whose own daughter was kidnaped in infancy. The girl does not foresee that Derry, now that he knows of the great wealth that is rightfully

hers will deliberately endeavor to kill their love.

CHAPTER IX

ROBIN reeled as she walked away from the telephone. There was another girl. Only that could account for his attitude. If it was the money alone that was coming between them surely he would tell her and not let her suffer.

And while Derry, white-faced and set-jawed, jiggled the receiver to call her back, and called himself a scoundrel and a fool for ever letting their love grow to such proportions when it could come to nothing, she went in to Mrs. Stewart and informed her Derry could not accept her kind invitation.

Mrs. Stewart's motherly heart grasped the heartbreak in Robin's tragic eyes. She took the girl in her arms and whispered, "If he truly loves you, child, no false pride can ever separate you. I will talk to the young man."

"No! No!" Robin pulled away. "Please don't. If he doesn't want me, I don't want him. I'll fight that Craven girl now . . . and try to forget him."

Had she known that Derry's engagement was with Lydia Craven she might have felt differently and been spared several sleepless nights, but Derry in his desire to aid her only added to her pain. When he telephoned her the next day she had Mrs. Stewart's maid tell him she was not at home and for many days she refused to speak to him.

CHAPTER X

DERRY had not been idle during the time Robin was becoming adjusted to her new position. Daily he looked over the press clippings for any reference to Dennison Brent's heiress, and occasionally found something. "Miss Brent, accompanied by Arthur Hemmingway, attended the premier of Straus's new opera 'Egyptian Helen.'" "Miss Brent, accompanied by Arthur Hemmingway, visited the showing of Pedro Goroni's painting of Lady Wellesly . . ." etc. Always Arthur Hemmingway's name.

Derry knew Hemmingway in a casual fashion. Once the scion of an impoverished, but aristocratic family, he had decided to go to work and his connection with the advertising agency was the result. Derry had had occasion to talk with him several times, and his droll manner and obvious inability to succeed at any kind of labor had rather attracted Derry. His friendship with the pseudo-heiress made Derry decide to cultivate that acquaintance.

He telephoned Hemmingway and invited him to luncheon, ostensibly to throw some business in his way, but in reality to obtain from him an introduction into the house on Madison Avenue.

Hemmingway, who accepted any and all invitations in order to augment his meager income, agreed at once. When Derry spoke of seeing his name coupled so often with Miss Brent's, he grinned knowingly.

"Yes," he drawled. "She's a charming girl. Money hasn't spoiled her at all. Old Landon, the trustee of her estate, is trying to play the ogre and ward off suitors, but she has a will of her own and I don't think his word will carry much weight."

"I'd like to meet her," Derry said nonchalantly. "I've heard so much about her, I feel she's too good to be true."

"I'll see if that can't be fixed." Hemmingway beamed genially. "I've

a pretty good stand-in there. Of course she isn't entertaining or going out yet, only to the theater once in a great while with me, but she might make an exception—with a friend of mine."

There was something so oily and suave in Hemmingway's voice that Derry felt it would serve him well right to be roped in by an adventuress. His conscience did not trouble him that he could not warn the man against Lydia.

Two days later Hemmingway dropped into his office and informed him Miss Brent would be charmed to have him dine at her home the following evening.

Ten minutes later Robin had telephoned.

Derry was an exceedingly handsome young man; few possessed his ability to wear evening clothes, so it is not to be wondered at that when Hemmingway introduced "My friend, Conway," to Lydia Craven she never associated the name with the Derry Robin had fallen in love with on the ship.

Derry had never seen the girl before and her appearance startled him. She had copied Robin's slow soft speech, her walk, her little gestures, so characteristically French, her way of dressing her hair, which by now the false heiress had bleached to a pale flaxen that defied the light to proclaim its artificiality.

In black velvet, with a gold scarf thrown about her slender white throat, her lips slightly crimson, her face delicately pale, there was a great resemblance to the girl he loved. And not only that, she possessed charm and magnetism. He could see that Hemmingway was more than fascinated and that the girl, herself, was madly in love with the aristocratic ne'er-do-well.

All during the evening he found it almost impossible to believe that this woman was an impostor; the deference shown her by the servants, her poise, her assurance were startling, and he realized the gigantic feat before him if he were to establish Robin's claims without money or papers.

Hoping to trip her he offered her a cigarette, but she smiled and shook her head. "No, I haven't been in New York long enough to acquire the habit," she said. "Madame Angèle did not approve of girls smoking so . . ." Robin's gesture, a flutter of both hands and a shrug of one shoulder. It was uncanny to Derrick.

"Madame Angèle?" he queried.

"My nurse, governess and companion," said Lydia, still smiling. "By the way, Arthur," she turned to Hemmingway, "I just received a curious letter from her, unless you read French you couldn't understand it, and even I can't quite grasp it." She rose slowly and crossed to an *écritoire* in one corner of the room, from a pigeon hole of which she extracted a letter.

"It seems," she continued, "that my dear old Madame has received a strange message from some person living here in the city who claims to be me, or rather claims to be Robin Brent. Madame is terribly upset about it and hopes I am not going to have any trouble."

At that moment Parker, the butler, announced dinner. Derry saw the old man glance in his direction and felt almost certain that he recognized him. His interest in Madame Angèle's letter was too great to weigh the consequences of discovery.

"What does Madame Angèle think of this person?" he asked, trying to disguise his eagerness. "Did she give you her name?"

"Yes. It's—" Lydia studied the letter, "Craven. Naturally Madame is

going to ignore it since this girl claims to be one person, then asks to have mail sent her to another name and an address of which Madame has never heard. I have asked my lawyer to write Madame not to worry, but to send him my birth certificate at once in case any trouble should arise." She laughed easily. "Not that I anticipate any . . . only it seems there is no resemblance in me to either of my parents . . . they were both dark and tall. Shall we go in to dinner? Parker is waiting."

During the meal Derry's thoughts raced. Unless that birth certificate could be secured before it reached Lydia Craven's hands, unless Madame Angèle could be convinced that an impostor was installed in Robin's home and be induced to come to New York, there was small hope for the girl he loved.

Almost he admired the coolly smiling woman at the end of the table. How secure she seemed. How utterly daring. He was impatient to get out of her presence and to reach Hooley. Did she know who he was? If not, and old Parker had recognized him as the man who had sought admittance on the day of their arrival, she would soon know. Forewarned was forearmed. What an adversary she was!

He heard Hemmingway inquire where Madame Angèle lived and with a sinking of the heart heard her reply that the old lady had gone to the south of France to stay with her son.

He dared not ask for the address.

Ten o'clock rolled around at last. He bade his hostess good-by and left without Hemmingway. On the avenue he turned and looked back at the lighted window. Silhouetted against the curtains he saw the girl slowly folded in the arms of Arthur Hemmingway.

He smiled grimly.

Love and intrigue. Which would win?

CHAPTER XI.

IT was after this that Derry tried in vain to reach Robin by telephone, while the girl fretted her heart out in silence and wondered why Madame Angèle did not answer her letter. In her excitement she had written the old French woman in English and her handwriting had not been the same in forming the letters. It never occurred to her that Madame had heard from Lydia and believed her real godchild to be the impostor.

It was through Tad Hooley that Derry finally saw Robin again. The investigator called upon Mrs. Stewart to inform her that one of his operators had found a clew to the whereabouts of her child's Spanish nurse. Hooley saw Robin. She looked so wan, so white and pathetic he concluded she was working too hard, worrying too much and needed some recreation. He invited her to have dinner with him, and Mrs. Stewart, who had learned to love her employee, insisted that Robin accept the invitation. Hooley invited Derry to join them.

They met at a little Japanese restaurant on Sixth Avenue, and though there were other diners present Derry simply opened his arms, and Robin with a half sob of relief ran into them and nestled there, her heart pounding with happiness and gratitude.

"Sweetheart, sweetheart," Derry whispered, oblivious of Tad Hooley; of every one in the crowded, low raftered room, "why wouldn't you come to the phone? Why wouldn't you see me?"

"I thought," she stammered, her face crimson, her eyes downcast, "that . . . you cared for some on else . . ."

"To let you down? I asked you to trust me. Aren't you ashamed? You will be, when I tell you all I have been doing and where I've been."

Derry forgot that he had made up his mind to give her up, that he was not going to marry her. With her lovely flushed face so close to his, her starry eyes looking up at him, he only remembered that he loved her and that she was the most desirable thing in the world.

"Here, here, break away," Tad Hooley bantered. "I'm not sponsoring a clinch."

Both laughed, and followed their host to a table. There Derry told Robin of his visit to the house on Madison Avenue, of the letter Lydia had received from Madame and of Lydia's obvious infatuation for Hemmingway. Tears sprang into Robin's eyes when he spoke of the letter.

"That is why Madame did not answer me," she said, her white forehead drawn into a frown. "And now she isn't in Paris. Her daughter lives in Nice, but I don't know the address."

"We must get hold of that letter somehow," Hooley said. "I had hoped to handle this matter without any great expense to you, Derry, but it looks as if our only hope lies in getting the old lady to come to New York and prove Miss Brent's identity. Even then if all the papers are in this Craven woman's hands we are going to have trouble . . ."

"There is Nanette and Mr. Thompson who both know me," Robin spoke up.

"Do you know where to reach them?"

Robin shook her head. "No, but Madame would know. Possibly Nanette is with her. Mr. Thompson lives in Paris some place."

"We must find Madame then. Somehow, some way we will get our hands on that letter, but until we do it is best that you don't communicate with her again, for she might write the Craven woman where you are and I believe Craven is desperate enough to do anything."

Derry, who was staring at the menu with an intensity that seemed to indicate food was the paramount thing in his life, suddenly broke in, "I have it! I know to a certainty that next week Lydia Craven is going to give a tea. Hemmingway has his eyes on the fortune also, and is doing everything to push her into the limelight with a view to marrying her. Robin must attend that tea."

"What!" Robin's eyes widened. "I'd never be admitted."

"I don't mean as a guest. Unquestionably Miss Craven will secure the services of a caterer. The caterer will send maids to assist the servants . . . Robin shall be one of those maids." Derry beamed.

"That's all very fine," Hooley answered scowling. "I don't doubt but that Miss Brent is actress enough to carry it through—a wig and make-up could disguise her enough so that Craven would not recognize her, not expecting to find her in her home—but who is the caterer, and how could you induce him to use Miss Brent instead of one of his own employees?"

"That," said Derry, "is where you come in. Why engage detectives if they can't find out a little thing like that? And why are you as big a man in your line as you are if you can't convince a person of the necessity of having an operator at an important gathering?"

"I see," said Hooley and smiled.

That evening was a memorable one for the two lovers. Shortly after din-

ner Hooley left them and they went to a movie and for two hours sat in the darkness, hands clasped, hearts renewing vows. A long drive followed. The fortune, the intrigue, the treachery, all were forgotten. Nothing existed but their love, and the barriers were lowered between them.

Derry told her how he had tried to overcome his love for her. How he had determined to give her up once she was in command of her estate, but that love of her had mastered pride. Robin, in his arms, whispered that she would rather starve in a garret with him than be the richest woman in the world and that if regaining her inheritance meant the loss of him she would never try to oust the impostor.

They separated at last after many kisses and promises of faith that could never be shattered, and neither dreamed that Fate held another trump card up her sleeve, a card that would almost wreck both of their lives.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO days later Robin received a telephone call from Hooley asking her to come to his office at once, to make any excuse plausible to her employer, but to be sure to secure two days vacation. The relationship between Robin and Mrs. Stewart had become a deep affectionate friendship and the girl did not hesitate to tell the latter the truth.

"Go by all means, my dear. I can get along very well while you are gone, but I shall be very interested to know what it is all about."

"Well," the investigator greeted Robin, "I've put it over. The Craven woman entertains to-morrow night; a reception, not a dinner, it seems, to announce her engagement to that young cad, Hemmingway. Dorset and Son are to do the catering. By luck I know the son. I handled a rather shady divorce case for him once, much against my wishes, and he is compelled to repay me. I told him it is absolutely necessary for me to install a detective in the house, and he has consented to send you as a maid. Now, my dear, it's up to you. Get a wig at Hepner's. A nondescript brown one that won't be noticeable, a pair of horn rimmed glasses and a dark dress and apron. Dorset will tell you what else to do."

Robin began to tremble. "I don't know how to serve . . . I can't act and . . ."

"You can speak French, can't you? You will be a French girl not understanding a word of English. Under his head man you certainly won't make any mistakes in passing sandwiches . . . or better still attending to the ladies' wraps. I'll wager you get by a lot better as a maid than that impostor does as a lady. Now, run along and get your disguise. Practice putting on the wig and a dark make-up, and remember, you don't know a word of English.

"Oh, yes," he added as she rose uncertainly. "You know why you are going there; to steal Madame's letters, the passport and, if it is there, your birth certificate."

"I know," she answered. "The letter may be there, but don't you suppose anything as valuable as the certificate and passport have been given to Mr. Landon to take care of?"

"I doubt it. She wouldn't want him to know just how valuable they are to her. There is a desk in the drawing room, Derry tells me she took the letter from it. Probably there is another writing desk in her boudoir upstairs. You must search both, and watch your

step while you do it. You don't want to face arrest as a thief."

Robin shivered. "I don't know if the money is worth it," she said slowly. "Derry and I won't need much when we are married. This fortune seems to have caused only trouble. If there was danger of arrest and separation from him I'd rather let Lydia keep it. I only cared about my name . . . but soon I'll have Derry's . . ."

"Dear Miss Brent," Hooley interrupted with a smile, "Derry has used every penny he possesses to fight this woman, and has got himself into debt besides. Whether you want the fortune or not you owe it to him to get him on his feet again."

Robin's cheeks whitened. "I didn't know that," she said. "I didn't know Derry had done that for me. I'll do as you say. And—" a wan little smile wreathed her lips. "I shan't fail."

WHETHER Vincent Dorset saw through her disguise or not mattered little. He gave the slim, brown-haired woman in the dark dress and spectacles a casual glance, addressed her in French and informed her her orders would come from Cappachini, a tall dark Italian. Cappachini in turn informed her, also in French, that until supper was served she would have charge of the ladies' cloaks and wraps.

It was with no little trepidation that Robin followed the Italian through the servants' entrance into the house on Madison Avenue. Parker admitted them, and Rogers showed them the rooms above where the ladies' wraps were to be placed, the pantries, buffets, drawing room and dining room. Two other young women accompanied them and two men.

Robin looked at the long corridors, the high ceilinged, oak paneled dining room, brilliantly lighted with candelabra, the reception rooms and winding mahogany staircase with a mingled feeling of interest and fury. All this was hers. That oil painting of the stately, dark man hanging over the marble fireplace was her father, that painting of a delicate auburn haired woman was unquestionably a likeness of her mother, the mother she had never seen. She hesitated long enough to study it, and could find no resemblance to herself, either in coloring or feature.

Those priceless rugs, antiques, richly upholstered furnishings were all hers to appreciate and enjoy; and a woman she had befriended had stolen them from her. She was justified in doing anything she could to regain them.

Rogers beckoned to her and she ascended the stairs after the old housekeeper. "Miss Brent is lying down," Rogers said, "so walk quietly. Her room adjoins this."

Robin looked at her blankly, remembering Hooley's admonition to know no English, but her heart beat tumultuously as she stepped across the threshold of a mauve and gray bedroom and realized she had but to open a door and confront the woman who had wronged her so bitterly.

She caught her reflection in a long cheval mirror and was startled for a second. Certainly she could meet Lydia face to face and Lydia would never recognize the woman in glasses and dark hair as her erstwhile shipmate. Robin removed her hat and simple cloth coat, hung them in a closet, then moved about the room, placing bits of cotton near the powder box on the dresser, a wisp of linen beside the cold cream jars, straightening hangers and getting everything in

readiness for the guests. She wondered if Derry had been invited and how she would feel if called upon to serve him.

Suddenly she realized she was not alone and turning saw a small blond woman in the doorway. Lydia, almost tall in a gold lace gown that touched the carpet at her feet, her yellow hair a shimmer of gold, banded with brilliants, her thin arms and throat blazing with jewels, faced her.

The listening girl slumped to the floor. She had heard her doom

For a moment Robin grew rigid. Her heart beat so fast she felt suffocated. Then she realized that Lydia did not recognize her.

"Mr. Dorset sent you, I suppose?" Lydia inquired.

"*Je suise française,*" Robin answered huskily. "*Je ne parle pas Anglaise.*"

"Oh," Lydia's cheeks darkened. She turned abruptly and descended the stairs. She would not trust her school French before a Frenchwoman.

Cappachini came up the stairs with his arms full of roses and instructed Robin to place them in a vase on the dressing table. He was laughing. "That signorina," he said in French, "she is so stupid. Never has she given a big party before, of that I am sure. Downstairs she is so busy doing this and that and so nervous. If it is possible you will get the big laugh by watching from the head of the stairs."

Robin smiled. She had every inten-

tion of seeing everything and had been wondering just where she could station herself. She welcomed Cappachini's suggestion of a spot just at a bend in the staircase where there was no light. She determined to place herself there later.

NINE o'clock, ten o'clock. Somewhere a bell sounded. Then a burst of laughter drifted upward. Tense, her hands like ice, her cheeks burning, Robin waited in the bedroom. Then she heard steps ascending the stairs. Two women in smart evening dress appeared. As though Robin did not exist they removed their evening wraps and tossed them on the bed, continuing a conversation that was distinctly personal. One dabbed powder on her nose, then they both went below.

Again the bell. Voices, laughter, footsteps. Soon Robin was busy. Finding rouge, lipsticks, assisting girls out of coats, adjusting shoulder straps, sewing on a hook, hanging up garments. Down the hall she heard men's voices. Parker was attending the gentlemen guests.

"Rather raw, a party like this, when her father hasn't been dead five months," commented a slender girl with inky bobbed hair and green eyes. "What's the idea, do you suppose?"

"It's Hemmy's bright thought," laughed her companion. "He wants all his creditors to know he is going to annex a fortune. If you ask me he's about on his last legs and unless the marriage is pulled off soon the big boy stands a good chance to becoming most declasse and going into bankruptcy too . . ."

"Hush!" whispered she of the green eyes, noting Robin beside her.

"Oh, she's French," shrugged the other. "She doesn't understand English at all. I asked her."

They left the room and Robin stood with her hands clasped over her heart thinking of what they had said. Lydia had wanted money so that some man would desire to marry her; now a man was going to do so because of the fortune he thought she possessed. Lydia, if she loved him, faced a heartbreak as well as prison. If only Derry weren't in debt, or she didn't owe him so much, Robin felt she would flee the house and let the wretched fortune and all the misery it would cause go by.

Laughter, music, dancing. Gay voices floated upward. Robin stole into the hallway and found her perch at the head of the stairs. Below she could see white aproned waitresses and black clad waiters running to and fro. Occasionally a couple wandered into her line of vision, but she saw nothing of Derry, nor did any more persons ascend the stairs.

Now was her opportunity to visit Lydia's room. Noiselessly she tripped back to her door, paused a second, then gently pushed open the door of the rose and gold room that was Lydia's boudoir. A dim light was burning in the bathroom adjoining, but the boudoir was in darkness.

Robin closed the door softly, locked it and turned on a light near a chaise longue. In one corner of the room she saw a gray enameled desk. The lid was raised and in the pigeon holes were several envelopes. It took but a second to cross the thick carpet and extract those envelopes, but it seemed a century to the panic-stricken girl. There were several notes from Arthur Hemmingway, his name in bold black letters on one corner of the envelopes, some bills, and a letter from Shelby Landon. Feeling guilty at reading another's corre-

spondence, even though it should have been addressed to her, Robin took the lawyer's letter from its casing and read:

DEAR MISS BRENT:

As per your request, I have deposited your passport and birth certificate with the stocks and bonds left in trust for you. I note what you said regarding your desire to marry Arthur Hemmingway and have your fortune turned over to you before you become of age. The latter I cannot do. Until you are eighteen your fortune is in my trust, according to your father's will. It must be obeyed. As to the marriage you speak of, I am strongly opposed to it. I have nothing personal against young Hemmingway, but there are reasons why you should not marry. If Madame Angèle has not explained them to you, and you persist in your desire to become Hemmingway's wife you will compel me to tell you. I should much prefer to withhold this knowledge from you until you are older and maturity has given you poise and understanding. Desiring only your happiness, I beg of you to put any thought of becoming a wife out of your heart for at least five years. Believe me, most sincerely yours,

SHELBY LANDON.

Robin stood there as though carved into stone. A reason why she must not marry. She, not Lydia Craven, since the letter was intended for Robin Brent. What reason? Was there some dark skeleton in her family? Some secret crime that had made her father keep her in banishment all these years? Some reason why she had never seen her lovely young mother and had been reared by strangers?

Would this secret separate her from Derry? They had overcome the obstacle of money, but now something else was going to part them. Oh, she must learn the truth from Landon! She couldn't endure the uncertainty another day. Did Lydia know the secret? A secret which could not harm *her*.

HER knees trembled so she sank on the chaise longue still holding the letter. Her face was as pale as death, her body like ice. For some time she sat motionless and did not hear the door in the room adjoining open nor the low murmur of voices until some one said the name, "Landon."

Landon! The man she desired to speak with was in the dressing room. She rose unsteadily and moved toward the door. With her hand on the knob she remembered that she was disguised, that Landon believed another to be Robin Brent and would unquestionably not listen to anything she had to say, nor give her the information she desired.

The voices became more distinct. Without any intention of eavesdropping Robin stood there and listened to a conversation, spoken in low tense tones, that sent her horrified and quivering with agony out of that house with no wish ever to return, no desire other than to die.

"It's all very well, Landon, to say don't marry. Robin, to say wait five years . . . ten years. But you'll have to give me some reason for doing it. Five years! Good lord, man, a thousand things could happen in five years. She's alone in the world, she loves me, she wants to become my wife, yet you insist, because you happen to have the guardianship of her fortune, that she has no right to marry until she's . . ."

"I do insist," the older voice answered, with a note of weariness. "I not only insist, I forbid it."

Hemmingway laughed. "Perhaps you want to marry her yourself," he said sarcastically.

"No. I don't want to marry her. I

pity her from the bottom of my soul, but I wouldn't have her for my wife, nor the possible mother of my children, for all the money in the world!"

"What the devil do you mean?" Hemmingway's voice rasped, and the shivering girl leaning against the door swayed as she heard her doom.

"I have warned Robin repeatedly that if she announced her engagement to you I should tell you the truth. I hoped to keep it locked in my heart as my friend Dennison did all those years, but I see that is an impossibility. I must trust to your honor to let this go no further. Haven't you wondered, Hemmingway, why Robin was reared abroad; why Dennison Brent lived here alone; why no one ever saw his wife for years before her death?"

"Yes."

"That wife was in an insane asylum for fifteen and a half years . . . she died there and the shadow of her tortured brain hangs over her child."

"Good God!"

"Child birth developed her insanity. There is scarcely a doubt that it wouldn't do the same thing for Robin. Marriage is absolutely forbidden her, at least until she is old enough to be beyond the possibility of motherhood."

"My God!" Hemmingway muttered. "She knows this . . . and was going to marry me?"

"Yes, she knows it. I had to tell her. Dennison kept her in seclusion, hoping to do so all her life, but at his death the responsibility reverted to me. It has proven too much . . ."

"The engagement shall not be announced," said Hemmingway. "It may be cruel, but insanity . . . God! It would be horrible to be tied to a living dead woman, unable to divorce her . . . unable to live . . . or to remarry . . ."

The girl at the door slumped slowly to the carpet and lay there, a shaking, tortured pulp of quivering flesh and nerves, unable to think, to move. She heard the prospective bridegroom commiserated upon his misfortune, heard him rail at a fate that deprived him of a wife and a huge fortune, and her white lips twisted in a grimace. There would be no marriage for her. *Never.* This was the end of romance, of love. Derry must pass out of her life forever.

All their beautiful dreams of a little home and babies must be put aside, all hope destroyed. She knew Derry would fight to hold her. Money might have separated them, but misfortune would make her dearer to him; he would want to give her his protection, but she could never accept it. No, all life was over for her. Nothing remained but death . . . Madame Angèle had spoken once of her becoming a nun. Yes. She would enter a convent and if her mother's dread fate overcame her she would be cared for.

"Oh, God! Let me die before that hour comes!" she moaned wringing her icy hands. "Let me die."

A woman's voice beat upon her consciousness. Lydia's. It was like cold water in her face. She moved, raised her head. Listened.

"So here is where you are! Why aren't you downstairs, Arthur? They are asking for you and supper will be served very shortly." A dead silence, then: "What is it? What has happened?"

"I have told him why you two must not marry," Landon said.

"Oh!" A half hysterical laugh. "You aren't stupid enough to believe that I have inherited any mad tendencies from my mother, are you, Arthur? You can see how perfectly sane I am. No one lets heredity interfere with marriage these days . . . not when one

doesn't want children." Her voice cracked on a shrill note.

"It happens I believe in heredity," Hemmingway answered slowly, coldly. "I wouldn't dare risk having a—" he paused, possibly realizing the callousness of his remark. "I'm sorry, Robin. But our wedding is off."

A sob, some pleas, a low mumble of voices. Then Robin rose to her feet, stood there with her hands clasped over her heavy heart for a moment, and without thought of what might happen to her if she were seen leaving the room, pushed open the door and fled down the stairway.

She almost collided with a man in dress clothes at the foot of the stairs, and at his murmured apology looked up into his face. Derry! Derry here! And he didn't recognize her.

She ran past him through the long corridor, out of the front door and into the street. Until a blast of cold air hit her face she was unaware she wore neither hat nor coat. But that mattered little. At the corner she hailed a passing taxi and gave the driver Mrs. Stewart's number. She could think of nowhere else to go.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE apartment was in darkness when she entered. She was grateful that her employer was in bed. She felt that if she had to answer questions or offer explanations at that hour she would surely go mad.

Mad, as her mother had been!

All that long dark night she lay awake, her brain on fire, her thoughts a seething turmoil of anguish and indecision. One moment feeling as if she could not endure life another hour, the next longing with every fiber of her to be folded in Madame Angèle's motherly arms and to sob out her heartbreak.

Derry! Derry! How could she live without him? Penniless, loveless! Why had she been born?

But with daylight came a little peace, and she fell into a fitful sleep. Mrs. Stewart, herself, awakened her at eight thirty.

"Something told me that you had returned," she said, sitting down beside the bed, "and I'm very glad you have. I missed you, Robin. You cannot imagine how I missed you."

For answer the girl reached out her arms and the white-haired lady gathered her in a warm embrace. "My dear," she whispered, "something has happened to upset you. What is it? Can't you tell me?"

The sympathy unloosed a flood of tears. Between sobs Robin explained what she had learned. Mrs. Stewart's face paled. Her eyes filled with tears. "You poor, poor child," she whispered. "You poor child."

At nine o'clock Derry telephoned. Robin hesitated about answering, then realized he must know the truth, that now was not the time to play the coward.

"Did you get the letter?" he asked eagerly.

"No. And the birth certificate and passport are in Mr. Landon's possession."

"Oh, that's tough. I'll see what I can do about getting hold of the letter for you . . ."

"Don't," she interrupted. "I don't want it. I'll explain when I see you."

His voice sounded surprised. "But madame's letter means everything to you, dear."

"I know, but I don't want it just yet. I want to see you as soon as you can come to me. It's very important."

"I'll be there by eleven, then. Oh, by the way, the engagement between her ladyship and Hemmingway was not announced last night."

"How do you know?"

"I'll explain that also, when I see you."

Derry arrived a little after eleven o'clock, but to Robin's dismay Tad Hooley was with him. She could not tell a stranger of her mother's misfortune, of the family skeleton her father had tried to keep buried all these years. But she soon learned that Hooley's interest was in Mrs. Stewart. His good-natured, florid face was crimson with excitement, and every red hair on his head seemed to bristle with importance.

He greeted Robin perfunctorily, and asked for her mistress. "I've something very important to tell her," he said; "please ask her to hurry, and you youngsters run along some place and don't disturb us."

Robin informed her employer of her visitor, then taking her hat and coat she joined Derry, who was standing before the fireplace, a deep scowl on his forehead. Robin had a feeling that her entrance interrupted a conversation, but she crossed to her lover and said quietly: "We'll go for a walk, Derry. Mrs. Stewart won't need me until Mr. Hooley is gone."

Neither spoke until they reached the street. Then Derry linked his arm in hers and said, "Well, sweetheart?"

"I wanted to see you," Robin began falteringly, "to tell you that I can't ever marry you."

TO her surprise he did not seem at all startled. Instead, he laughed lightly. "And I wanted to see you," he said, "to tell you I had decided we were foolish to put off the happy event a day longer. As it is, you aren't under any one's guardianship, and I think you should be under mine. What say, sweetheart, shall we give Mrs. Stewart notice and tell her we are going to be married to-morrow?"

"Don't joke about it, please," Robin said in a choked voice. "I am serious, Derry. I love you; as long as I live I shall love you; but . . . I've learned something — something about my mother—that makes it impossible for me ever to marry."

He looked down at her lovely pale face and quivering lips, and his own cheeks whitened. "Darling," he said tensely, "are you going to let that article in the paper separate us? Is that what you are trying to tell me?"

"Article in the paper? I never saw any. Derry, my mother died in an—"

"I know," he said, deep sympathy in his voice; "the paper hints broadly at that, and that damn cad Hemmingway has broadcast it to the world."

"Hemmingway!" she gasped.

"Yes. It seems the Craven woman had intended to announce her engagement to him last night, and some of the reporters got on to the fact—she hadn't been reticent about it, you see. When nothing came of her talk, one news hound hunted up the prospective fiancé and wanted the dirt. Hemmingway hedged, then informed him that Miss Brent's guardian had told him that there was insanity in the family, and he thought it best to call off the engagement. Dog!"

"And it's in the papers! How horrible. Oh, Derry, Derry!" She swayed, and but for his arm about her would have stumbled blindly. They were near the Plaza. He led her into the lounge and sat beside her on a divan. There she told him of the conversation she had overheard the night before and her decision never to marry.

"Do you think that makes any difference to me?" he asked, holding both of her hot little hands in his. "It only makes me more determined than ever to marry you. I'm not an Arthur Hemmingway! I am not going to deny that the truth about your poor mother shocked me . . . but there is no reason why your fate should be the same as hers. With my love and care I am certain it can be avoided . . ."

"No," she moaned. "I would always be afraid . . . and *he* said 'tied to a living dead woman!' I couldn't do that to you."

"If misfortune should come to you, dear," he said tenderly, "I want to share it. If you were able to convince me that I should share your inheritance of good fortune, surely I have the right to share your unhappy inheritance. I am going to take the right."

"You are wonderful," Robin sobbed. "No wonder I love you so much. But I could never accept your sacrifice. There isn't anything for me to do but go back to Madame Angèle . . . maybe enter a convent . . ."

"We won't talk of that now, sweet," he said, pressing her hand. "You are all upset at present, and not in a condition to think rationally. Later you will come to my way of thinking, I know."

They had luncheon in a little tea room, then strolled back to the apartment house on Park Avenue. At the elevator Derry kissed her, unabashed by the presence of the operator in uniform, then left her to ascend to the apartment alone.

That kiss was Robin's renunciation to love and life. She never intended to see him again. Parting would be too bitter. She was too weary and heartsick to argue with him; too weak in her love for him to hold out against his desires; but she was determined he should not sacrifice his life for her.

HER steps lagged as she walked down the hallway, half expecting to find Hooley still in the apartment. Instead she saw Mrs. Stewart's maid, Rose, on her knees before a trunk in the living room, surrounded by piles of lingerie, shoes, frocks, cloaks, and hats, and Mrs. Stewart herself, pallid of face, eyes glittering, stuffing papers and toilette articles, stockings and useless odds and ends in a bag.

"Robin!" the widow exclaimed when she stepped inside. "Thank God, you've returned. Robin! What do you think, Mr. Hooley has at last found a clew to my child! He brought me a letter from Mequilla, the nurse who cared for my baby . . . after all these years, a letter . . . from Mequilla . . . Elfredo is in Italy . . . Elfredo kidnaped my little Louise . . . for revenge—and she . . . Oh, how could any one be so cruel—helped him because she loved him! He escaped on a freighter to France with her, and has been in Italy all these years. Think of it, Robin! Mequilla was dying, and she had to confess to me before she could go to her Maker!"

Great tears rolled down the poor woman's cheeks. She caught Robin's hands and pressed them feverishly, overcome with her emotion.

"Let me see the letter," Robin said. "Does it tell you where your daughter is, or where to find Elfredo?"

"No . . . We'll have to search for them. Mequilla committed her crime for nothing, for Elfredo never sent for her to join him, and she hadn't heard from him for years. A detective in Mr. Hooley's employ found her in Havana, and on her death bed she wrote

this letter for me. But it's a clew, Robin. The first certain thing I have had since I lost my baby. I'm sailing to-morrow night . . . alone, if you won't come; but I wish you would."

"Of course I will go with you," Robin said quietly. "You know I want to."

Mrs. Stewart kissed her gratefully. "And your sweetheart?"

"I will explain to him. He will understand," Robin answered with white lips.

Her opportunity! She would find Madame Angèle . . . separate herself from Derry and assist Mrs. Stewart. With the ocean between them Derry could not break down her defenses with his tender arguments. The fortune and Lydia Craven were forgotten.

CHAPTER XIV

EVERY particle of color drained from Derry's ruddy cheeks as he read Robin's letter.

MY DARLING DERRY:

When this reaches you I will be at sea. Mrs. Stewart has discovered news of her daughter—ask Mr. Hooley to tell you about it—and she is on her way to Italy. I am going with her. We will sail to-night at midnight. It is best, Derry, dearest. I am weak and I love you, oh, so much, so much that my heart is bleeding when I think that I may never see you again, and I am not brave enough to tell you good-by. But my lover, I could never ruin your life. You must forget me and some day marry a girl who is worthy of you. There will never be any man in my life. There will never be any one in my heart but you, but always I shall pray for your happiness.

Your loving broken-hearted

ROBIN.

For the hour following Derry was like a madman. He rushed over to Hooley's office, hoping against hope that the ship carrying his loved one from him had not sailed, only to find that Robin had left the night before. Hooley gave him what information he could; that Mrs. Stewart, acting on his instructions, had booked passage to Naples, and one of his operators had taken the same vessel, the Roma, for Italy to trace the whereabouts of Elfredo Diaz.

Never had Derry irked so against his poverty. Riches would have carried him overseas on an airplane, or an express steamer. Now he had to fret and fume and try to raise capital enough to pay for passage on a cabin boat, or second class on a liner.

"I don't want to give you advice, my boy," Hooley said, pitying him from the bottom of his soul; "but the girl is right. She shouldn't marry. I'm sorry the truth came out, inasmuch as it ruins her happiness, but now that you do know it, it would be worse than foolhardy to rush into marriage with her. If you really love her the kindest thing for you to do is to rout out that impostor some way and get the fortune, so that she may have something with which to meet misfortune."

Derry's gloomy gray eyes merely stared blankly at him. "If you'll show me how you can kick her out I'll do it gladly," he said.

Hooley paced the floor, his hands jammed in his pockets. Suddenly he whirled.

"I think," he said slowly, "that the best thing we can do is to go directly to Landon and lay our cards on the table. He knows me by reputation. The fact that a girl, in love with you, is willing to give you up because of insanity in her family, must show him there is truth in our statements. He should be pretty thoroughly disgusted

with his psuedo ward by now, and ready to listen to reason. What say? Are you ready to try it?"

"I'll go with you," Derry answered. "But there isn't anything you or he or Robin can say that will make me give her up."

Luckily Shelby Landon was in his office. Tad Hooley's card secured them admittance.

The lawyer listened gravely to Hooley's story, at first frankly incredulous, then amazed. When Derry added his information he stared at the two visitors as though they had dropped through the clouds from Mars.

"Dear, dear!" he muttered. "This is astounding. I can't believe it. I know you are sincere in what you say . . . but it doesn't seem possible that any woman would attempt such a fraud. Letters to and from Madame Angèle, the passport, the birth certificate . . . I will look into it, of course . . . but I can't believe it. I should like to see this other young lady, the one who claims she is Robin Brent."

"She sailed last night for Italy," Derry answered gloomily. "I don't know when she is returning."

"That complicates matters," Sheldon Landon answered, rising. "Too bad you waited so long to come to me."

His attitude indicated that the interview was at an end. Derry looked at the investigator and rose also. As he did so Landon's secretary came into the room. "Mr. Hemmingway to see you," she said. "He asked me to tell you it's very important."

"Hemmingway!" exclaimed Derry. "I want to see him."

"I've no objections," Landon said.

The scion of the Hemmingway's impoverished fortunes did not look quite as dapper as usual when he came into the office. There were lines running from his aristocratic nose to his thin lips, and circles under his eyes.

He started perceptibly when he saw Derry and muttered: "Thought you were alone, Landon; I'll wait until you are at liberty."

"Don't mind us," Derry interposed. "We're going, but I've an idea you would like to know why we are here."

Hemmingway slumped into a swivel chair. He laughed with a queer twisted mouth. "My business is rather private . . . at least it should be; but I'm hanged if I care whether the whole world knows or not. Landon," he leaned forward, resting his arms on the polished mahogany top of the writing desk, "did you know, or were you by any chance a party to the most gigantic hoax ever perpetrated on a man?"

"What do you mean?" Landon's voice was like granite.

"That your precious ward—I'll call her that—is no more Robin Brent and an heiress than I am—"

"What? How do you know?" Derry grasped his shoulder.

"She told me. When she found I wouldn't marry her because of insanity in her family, she informed me she wasn't a Brent, and that the real heiress is knocking around New York somewhere. Vowed me to secrecy, and thought I'd grab her, crooked business and all!" He groaned. "Gad! What won't some women do for money?"

"Or love," Landon said dryly. "Well, gentlemen," addressing Derry and Hooley, "I guess that confirms your story."

Hemmingway looked at the others. "Story?"

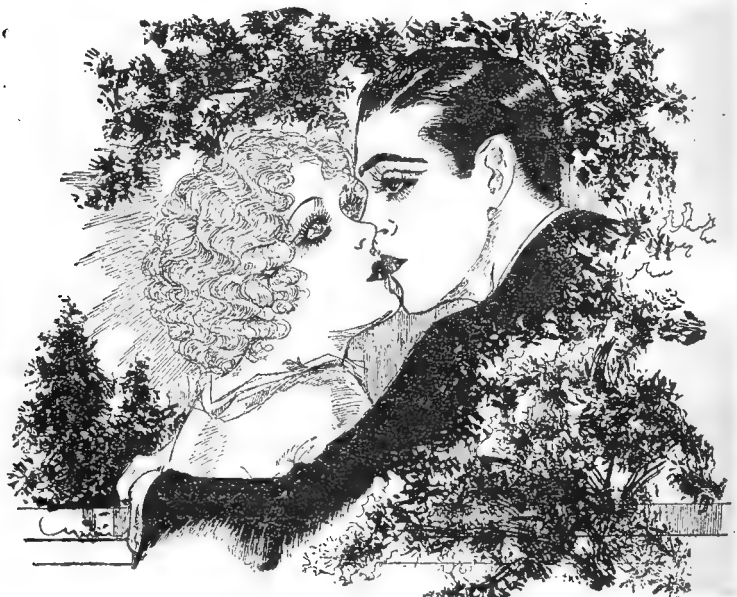
"Mr. Hooley, who is a criminal investigator, has just informed me that the woman is an impostor. I shall take

means to reinstate the real Miss Brent immediately. But" — his steely eyes fastened on Hemmingway's—" if I see you hanging around her home I'll have you kicked off the place. There's the door."

Hemmingway rose, stretched himself languidly. "Thanks. I might have known that gratitude is an obsolete emotion." He bowed and passed out of the room.

He was a cad and a fortune hunter, but he was not a crook. He would have married her for the fortune, but he was too big a coward to live on stolen money.

She was no fool. She knew that immediate flight was the only course open to her. Once Landon knew the truth the arm of the law would reach out for her. She had been prepared for this moment, and she wasted no tears for the man she had loved with all her heart and who had failed her. They would come later.



And there, where first they had met, he folded her close

CHAPTER XV

LYDIA realized, when the door closed behind Arthur Hemmingway, that she had made her first false move in her game of intrigue. Hemmingway would not keep her confession a secret. He did not love her.

She withdrew all money deposited in her name, hastily packed two suitcases, called a taxi, and before the astonished Rogers could interrogate her, left the house on Madison Avenue never to enter it again, some five thou-

sand dollars better off than when she had entered it.

A rooming house in Harlem housed her for a few days, then, certain she was not followed, and that neither Robin nor Shelby Landon would like the publicity entailed in an arrest, she took a boat for Miami under the name of Ruth Dayton, there to try to forget Arthur Hemmingway, and if possible ensnare a rich man in her meshes.

Finding the bird flown, Landon told the servants the truth, and decided that for Robin's good and his own reputation it was best nothing should be done. Robin would probably live abroad, and five thousand dollars deducted from millions meant but a small loss.

Derry's boat sailed the following Tuesday. A cablegram from Mrs. Stewart informed Hooley that they had arrived in Naples, but intended to go to Rome as the detective on the case had heard that a man named Elfredo Diaz, who had lived in Naples until recently had made Rome his home for the past year. It was doubtful if he was the man she was after, but she was going to hunt him up if possible. Consequently Derry's objective was Rome.

Rome is a great city. Even with a large fortune at her command, Mrs. Stewart discovered she could learn nothing of Elfredo Diaz there.

Those days were bitter ones for Robin. She had learned to love her employer, and she felt certain that when Mrs. Stewart found her daughter her services would no longer be required. She desired, for Mrs. Stewart's sake, that the missing Louise be discovered, but dreaded for her own sake the day when she would be left alone.

Valiantly she tried to push Derry out of her thoughts, but there wasn't a waking hour when his face was not before her. Her love grew stronger with separation.

At times she bitterly regretted her quixotic act in putting him out of her life. He had wanted her, heritage and all. But she realized she had done right. When his letter arrived with the information that he was on his way to Europe panic seized her. If he followed her to Rome she would not have the strength to refuse him again.

She took the letter to Mrs. Stewart and explained her position.

"My poor little girl," the other woman said, her eyes filmed with tears. "If I could help you I'd give half my fortune. I can't even advise you. But it almost seems as if you would be justified in marrying him when he loves you so much. After all, you are very rich, and money will . . ."

Robin shook her head. "No. I haven't even money now. I can't carry on the fight with Lydia Craven. It seems so useless, so hopeless when I . . ." Her chin quivered and she paused abruptly, unable to finish her sentence.

"Why, dear, didn't he tell you? Doesn't Mr. Conway know? There is no fight to carry on. I have a letter from Tad Hooley here that explains it all. The Craven woman has disappeared. She told Hemmingway the truth, and he told your guardian. All you have to do is to go to him and claim your fortune."

Robin stared at her, only half comprehending. Mrs. Stewart handed her Hooley's letter which had arrived on the same mail. Robin read it, her face whitening.

"That explains what Derry meant when he said, 'Of course you don't need me really, but I need you, and I don't intend to let a fortune stand in the way any more than I do your other

inheritance.' I wonder if the letter I received last week was from Mr. Landon. I forgot to open it."

Mrs. Stewart laughed softly. "Dear, dear, what a terrible business woman you would be. A letter from the States and you didn't open it. Get it at once."

Robin went to her room, and a few moments later returned with a legal sized envelope. Her sweet lips were tightly set, and her eyes misty. "It is," she said slowly. "He tells me to return to New York at once . . . that the impostor has fled. I never dreamed there was anything like this in the envelope. I thought it was an advertisement."

"New York! That means you will have to leave me. Oh, Robin, dear, I can't give you up." Kind hands clasped hers. "I may never find my little daughter, and if I should lose you now . . . it's too much."

"I shall never leave you," Robin said. "Next to Derry I love you better than any one in the world. I shall write Mr. Landon and ask him if I can't stay with you until you return to New York. Anyway" — stubbornly—"I wouldn't go back without seeing madame for anything."

"I have thought of that, and was going to suggest we go to Paris at the end of the week. Unless, of course, you want to wait to see Mr. Conway."

"No. I don't want to—see him."

CHAPTER XVI

SUNDAY morning found them in the gay French city, sitting in the high-ceilinged salon of the home where Robin had spent her childhood, facing a pallid, gray-haired woman, who twisted her handkerchief between two withered hands and looked appealingly at Robin and Mrs. Stewart.

Madame Angèle had been ill and had only returned to her native Paris the week before, there to find an astounding letter from Shelby Landon awaiting her, a letter which informed her that the girl who had written her in badly spelt French, and whom she had supposed was the godchild she had reared, was an impostor, and that the real Robin Brent was in Europe, heartbroken.

Now Robin, a slenderer, whiter, but lovelier Robin, was in her salon, begging for information of the mother she had never known.

"She wasn't like you at all," madame said in faltering English. "She was tall, with auburn hair, dark eyes. Her nature wasn't like yours. She had temper and fire, much fire. No control over emotions. I knew her very well. Several months before you were born I was her companion—and afterward— Until the tragedy I cared for her as well as you."

"Tragedy? You mean when she lost her mind?" Robin asked softly.

"Yes." Madame's dark eyes avoided Robin's pain-stricken ones.

"What brought on the disaster?" Mrs. Stewart asked, laying a sympathetic hand on Robin's. "I was under the impression Robin's birth caused it, but from what you say, Robin was quite a little girl before the tragedy occurred. Perhaps if we knew the whole truth it would make a great deal of difference in Robin's life. Her happiness is at stake. She loves this young man so much, but she will never marry him—"

Suddenly Madame Angèle covered her face with her trembling hands and burst into a storm of sobs. Robin ran to her side, and kneeling, wound her arms about the shaking figure.

"I've been a wicked woman," ma-

dame moaned. "A wicked woman. Oh, my God! I shall never forgive myself!"

"You warned me, dear," Robin whispered. "I should have heeded you, but I didn't. You said I shouldn't fall in love . . . but madame, dearest, I couldn't help myself. He crept into my heart before I knew it, and I couldn't push him out. But I won't marry him. I'll never make another suffer as I am suffering."

"My *petite,* my poor *petite,*" sobbed the old woman. "I, who love you best in the world, have brought this upon you. But you must marry your lover, *chérie. You have the right.*"

Robin drew back amazed.

"*Oui,* you have the right. You are not Madame Brent's baby, nor his. You are but the little orphan I substituted when the true Robin was killed!"

"What!" Robin sprang to her feet, while Mrs. Stewart caught her arm to steady her.

"There was the accident," madame went on wildly. "Your papa, I mean Mr. Brent, was in Rome when it happened. Madame Brent was ill, very ill, and I had charge of the little girl. We were strolling on the boulevard . . . the baby was full of the life and activity—she got out of my grasp and ran across the pavement—a motor car was coming fast . . . toward her . . . too late I reached her side. The baby was struck!

"I picked up her little body—cold and bruised—Madame Brent—when she saw her child gave one shriek and fainted. Later there was no mind there. To her the child still lived. It was terrible. The little one cold in death . . . the mother—raving, hysterical . . . the father in a far country. I was distracted. Then I thought quickly.

"A week before I had seen a man on the Bois with a child, a little girl with the yellow curls of the baby Robin—so near the same age—so sweet, and he was so cold and hard to her. I went to the Bois. I searched. For two days I searched for that man to ask him to lend to me his baby . . . just to see if madame would cease raving if she held a child in her arms. One day I found him. The baby looked ill and unhappy. He scowling and angry. He did not love his baby.

"I begged of him to come to the house with me, just for the hour, maybe. Just to lend me his child. He said 'Take her. She is a damned nuisance. She costs me time and money,' and handed the little one to me. I was so excited when Madame Brent hugged her in her arms and crooned, 'My Robin, my Robin!' I did not think, at first, how strange it was that a father should act so. Then a day pass, two, and he did not come for his child, and I think how strange that the baby look English, and him, her father, so Latin, Italian or Spanish, maybe . . ."

"Spanish!" cried Mrs. Stewart.

"Oh, *oui, madame.* The week passes. Madame Brent improves. Her mind, no, but her body. I had feared she would die, but no, she lives. I look for the father, worried, and hoping he will let the baby stay with us longer. But I do not see him. One day a letter comes, it is put under the front door, and is addressed to 'the nurse.' It is badly written, some French, some English, mostly Spanish. I read enough Spanish to understand. He says the baby is not his, that he does not want her, as there is danger in keeping her, but if I care to risk the danger I may have her. He says he had kidnaped her for revenge, and that her name is Louise. That was all. I never saw

him again. I dismiss all the servants. Secure new ones, and when Monsieur Brent returns from Rome, I . . ."

Mrs. Stewart's face was as white as death. "Kidnaped! Louise! Oh, my God! Is it possible! Have I found my child? You, Robin! You!"

Robin swayed toward her. The next moment the two were in each other's arms, sobbing in gratitude and happiness. "This is why I loved you from the first," Nancy Stewart whispered. "I know you are my daughter, my little golden-haired daughter who was stolen from me!"

The puzzled madame was given the story. With tears streaming down her own cheeks she went to a wardrobe and brought out a tattered petticoat and handed it to the mother. "This is all I have," she said. "I kept it, because of the initial embroidered on it. I thought some day I would be faced with my sin."

Mrs. Stewart took the garment and buried her face in the folds. "I stitched those letters," she sobbed. "L. S. My baby! My baby!"

NO reproaches for madame in that hour. They scarcely listened to the remainder of her narrative. How nothing had saved the stricken Madame Brent; how she had reared the little substitute Robin with a prayer in her heart that the fortune she would inherit would compensate for the other heritage forced upon her.

For hours they talked in the salon. Even Derry was forgotten. Then Robin said suddenly, a shy sweet smile on her lips, "Mother, the first time I ever saw Derry he was sitting on a bench in the Bois. I feel that when I see him again that is where he will be. He knows by now we are in Paris . . . something tells me that he is waiting for me. May I—"

CHAPTER XVII

DERRY was sitting on the bench just as he had been sitting that first day when she had passed him accompanied by madame. He rose quietly at her approach and came toward her. There was no surprise on his face, only happiness and welcome.

"With all my soul I have been willing you would join me," he said, bending over her little cold hand. "I knew your heart would answer mine. I knew you would come to me."

And there, under the chestnut trees, in the bright glow of the sunlight, he folded her in his arms and kissed her. "My wife," he whispered. "My little wife. Nothing can ever separate us but death."

"Nothing," she answered.

He said she had tricked him into marriage when he learned that she was the heiress to two fortunes instead of one, and that there was no cloud to obscure her future, but he smiled as he said it, and Robin knew that deep in his proud heart he was glad he had not known the truth before he slipped the ring on her finger.

They begged Nancy Stewart to live with them when the house on Madison Avenue was reopened, but that sagacious woman refused.

"I shall be near you, always," she said. "And my happiness is in seeing yours. Lovers should be alone."

No one ever heard of Lydia Craven again, and it is doubtful if those whom she had wronged deepest ever gave her a thought. Somewhere life was giving her what she deserved and that was punishment enough.

THE END

"Boop-boop-a-doop, everybody!" She poised, a vivid flame

Smarty Girl

Pen found the secret of how to be popular—in her own heart

By Daisy Dean

"C'MON, Pen, do your stuff!"

At Dick Jordan's words, echoed by several other boys, Penelope Dare stopped showing off for an exclusive crowd of six before the fireplace and began showing off for everybody.

She was going to do her imitations. Commencing with Al Jolson, followed by Calvin Coolidge, she would wind up with a miscellaneous group of movie stars. In all fairness, Pen could imitate people in an excellent amateur manner.

There was something vividly pathetic about the luminous hazel eyes in the pointed little face as she forced her expressions through the paces of those of a succession of famous folk.

Pen went to such obvious trouble to

make herself popular. And she thought she was popular. Never once did she think of herself as a show-off!

Her Lillian Gish was the best of all. If Pen had ever bothered to be herself she might have resembled Lillian; except that her childish lips were arrogant and smug, rather than sweet, like those of the star, and she wore her taffy-colored hair in short, pert curls, not long ones.

Her worst imitation was Clara Bow, because it was what Pen so ardently desired to be like in her nineteen-year-old It-ful personality—and wasn't.

As she swaggered about in the imitation which would, no doubt, have made Clara blush she saw one pair of eyes upon her which had never been upon her before.

The owner of the eyes stood in the doorway, viewing her in cool, amused detachment. Sardonic condescension flickered in his amber glance. He had a lean, tanned, expressive face with a firm chin and mouth. All at once Pen wanted this unknown to admire her more than she had ever wanted anything. Attempting to make the imitation a trifle wilder to impress him she made it a shade worse.

The cool indifference of the newcomer caused her heart to hammer, her eyes to sparkle, her pulses to race, a vivid flush to dye her white skin, as the Clara Bow imitation swung to an end, concluding Pen's performance.

She took her bows in dramatic fashion, smiling deliberately into the deep, amber eyes. But as the amber eyes did not smile back she became somewhat panicky. The stranger continued to regard her as if she were something out of a museum. Why, he didn't admire her at all!

Pen had the conviction that his eyes dismissed her coolly as the applause died down amid the boys' shouts of: "That a baby, Pen!"

Well, she'd make him admire her! She'd show him. Instead of retiring to a corner, Smithville's most popular girl instigated a new way of centering attention on herself.

Suggestive wisecracks flew insolently from her lips. Every one laughed at the wisecracks about every one else, but nobody laughed at their own. Much that bothered Pen! She didn't mind at whose expense she flourished as—popular.

Finally she came around to the new young man, who still watched her unsmiling.

"Boop-boop-a-doop," she remarked flippantly. "This must be Buster Keaton's only rival. Your face would crack if you smiled, wouldn't it? What's your trouble, brother? Won't your best friend tell you?"

Every one laughed except the newcomer. Pen herself wondered how she had been able to speak so impudently, when merely standing before him caused her heart to throb, her cheeks to flame and a dizzy sensation to sweep over her.

He did not reply to her buffoonery. He merely twisted his lips in one-sided indifference. Pen wanted to snap her fingers in his face and turn to the next victim of her sallies, but she couldn't. She had lost her voice, her quick wit, her dramatic ability, as she stood before him waiting—and not knowing at all what she was waiting for.

There was an awkward silence.

Dick, sensing something peculiar, stepped over and introduced the new man to Pen. His name was Verne Mace. Yes, she knew who he was now. Colonel Mace's nephew and heir, just graduated from college. Often she had passed the big, silent house on Elm

Street, with its drawn green shutters and air of being deserted.

Verne said: "How do you do, Miss Dare," in an impersonal, deep, musical voice, while Pen remained standing before him, unable to grasp the force which held her, painfully conscious he did not approve of her and wanting to cry and stamp her feet about it—in bad little girl fashion.

As long as Pen had ceased to show-off the others began to dance to the radio. Pen, unaware of everything, merely played with the thought that he would take her in his arms and dance, too.

At last he spoke—directly to Pen.

"I know you'll pardon me, Miss Dare, while I dance a round with Sally."

Her face turned brick red as he passed her by and took Sally, the hostess, in his arms. A crazy stab of wild pain filled Pen's heart. So that was what he thought he liked! Silent, wispy sit-in-the-corner girls like Sally!

"Dance, Pen?" Dick's voice broke in on her hurt resentment.

"No." Her reply was rude, for she was immersed in her own dark anger. Verne Mace. Who was he to high-hat her? She'd show him. He couldn't get away with that. He'd recognize the fact that she was a popular girl, and she'd make him like her, too.

PEN measured the big room for something startling to do. Something which would divert attention toward her again. Something more daring than she had ever done before.

At once she decided. She would dance on the Spanish shawl which draped itself across Sally's mother's grand piano.

No sooner thought than done—with Pen. Attaining the top of the piano, she poised like a slender, vivid flame, crying out:

"Boop-boop-a-doop, everybody! Hi! Hi!"

As every one stopped dancing to watch her she contorted her small body into a series of eerie movements. The dance was merely an exaggerated expression of her own suddenly awakened heart and the sting of Verne's indifference.

He and Sally stood slightly apart toward the back of the piano, while the rest of the crowd politely encouraged Pen from across the keyboard.

Sally's face bore a worried furrow as she nervously regarded the front door. Any moment her mother might come home and certainly disapprove of Pen's dancing on the grand piano.

Verne also frowned his displeasure, causing Pen to grow more and more infuriated. From the corner of her eye she could detect his further lack of admiration.

Well, he *would* pay attention to her! He would admire her! She'd make him! Dancing toward the back of the piano beside him, she purposely stumbled, lost her footing and fell directly into his arms.

She knew he would catch her. Beneath his indifference he was a gentleman. A thrill of satisfaction, plus a delicious sense of fear held Pen as he grasped her protectively.

She leaned against his shoulder pretending she was jarred and hurt when she wasn't at all, while the crowd hovered about in solicitous concern.

"Gee, Pen," gasped Stuffy Blaine, "that was a close call. Know you coulda killed yourself fallin' off that piano? Better dance on the floor, after this. Good thing you were catcher on the Newton team, Verne."

Opening her hazel eyes, Pen saw Sally straightening the Spanish shawl with tight lips and blazing eyes.

"Take me home," sobbed Pen. "My head is bursting."

She was openly angling for Verne's offer to escort her, but he merely turned to Dick, using his provokingly impersonal tone of voice:

"I believe Miss Dare would be better off at home. Your car is outside, isn't it, Dick?"

"Sure," said Dick affably. "Get your glad rags on, Pen."

Darn! Darn! Darn! Pen thought over and over again as she slipped into her light spring coat and angora béret. It hadn't done her one bit of good. He hadn't shared the detached thrill she had known at being in his arms. He did not like her. And now Dick was waiting to drive her home, the party was proceeding quite well without its popular girl, she had made a fool of herself and Sally was angry.

This was impressed on Pen when she was left to search unaided in the bedroom for her wraps. Not that she cared about Sally's anger. Girls didn't like Pen, anyhow. Jealous because she was so popular. Yet she seemed about as popular with Verne Mace as the hives!

On a sudden impulse she decided she would walk out on Dick and sneak home by herself. She tiptoed to the back entrance of the bungalow and out the door, crossing the lawn softly. She had to pass the front veranda and some one was out there, leaning against the railing.

Pen paused. Necessary to wait until they went in. Crouching beside the shrubbery she recognized the voices of Sally and Verne.

"She's always making a holy show of herself," Sally declared vehemently, "and she might have known better than to dance on a grand piano. On mother's Spanish shawl dad brought back from Madrid! But Pen never thinks of anything except showing herself off! Let her go home. I don't care."

"I have a feeling she fell off the piano on purpose, although I can't imagine why," Verne said. "I agree with you she is a Little Miss Show-off. A smarty-cat girl. And I don't care for that sort of popularity."

"I hate it," opined Sally. "I don't know why we tolerate her at parties, but of course the men think she's cute and all that."

"Here's one man who doesn't, Sally," stated Verne.

SOMEHOW Pen managed to retrace her steps and found herself back in the bedroom again. Oh, what had he called her! Little Miss Show-off! Smarty-cat girl! Her face in the mirror was deathly white, for the world seemed to have crashed about her feet. Sally had said every one tolerated her at parties. *Tolerated* her! And she had thought herself admired, beloved. She had always tried so hard to be popular.

She would let Dick drive her home after all. Never let on she knew what they all thought of her. Wide-eyed, silent, wistful she joined Dick in the hall. Noticed with new eyes that the girls did not bid her good-by. Only the boys waved her off sympathetically.

She pretended not to notice the two figures at the end of the veranda as she and Dick went down the steps and out to his car. Wordlessly they drove the two blocks to Pen's home.

"I never knew you to be so silent, Pen. You must have really hurt yourself."

She blinked back two scalding tears at Dick's words.

"I'm all right, Dick. Lost my pep, that's all. Thanks for driving me home. Good night."

She had never thanked Dick for driving her home before. At his startled expression she turned and ran blindly into the house.

Little Miss Show-off! Smarty-cat girl! The phrase rang in her mind. Parties and parties passed in review in which she had given her imitations, danced, wisecracked and been entertaining. And all the while the girls thought her a show-off. Tolerated her! Wished she would stay home. And to-night when she had tried so hard to impress him—Verne Mace—he had disliked her. Saw through her pretense of falling off the piano. Show-off! She felt as if she couldn't bear it.

Suddenly she realized the family were still up. Why? Then she remembered why. Grandma Dare, whom she had never met, was to have arrived for a two months' visit. Her mother had asked Pen to stay home from the party to greet grandma, but she had begged off. Had presumed, in her blind stupidity, that a party in Smithville could not go on without her.

Never had she felt so crushed, so little, so lonely. It wiped the arrogant expression from her lips and caused the hazel eyes to grow bigger and more luminous. She appeared very sweet, very young, very sad and hurt as she crossed the living room.

"Why, Penny, dear," exclaimed her mother, "you're early."

The clock on the mantel said ten. Yes, she was at least three hours early.

"I came home to meet grandma," she fibbed affably, her eyes resting on the lady who sat before the fireplace, all in snowy white. Grandma Dare was sixty-odd and somehow, while she was modern in many ways, she gave an impression of old lace and lavender, too. Her white hair was parted in the center and waved into a soft coil at the base of her neck. Her mouth was sweet and her eyes the luminous hazel of Pen's.

A wistful Pen realized with startling clarity that she and grandma looked alike, and through her troubled heart she hoped she would be as sweet at sixty and that then they wouldn't think her a show-off.

"Why, my dear little Penelope," Grandma Dare said as she arose to take the girl in her eager arms. Nor did she miss the pensiveness of her granddaughter's face.

"Why, grandma," Pen gasped, "you're so sweet!"

"You're mighty sweet yourself, dear child, and I think you and I are going to be great friends."

The words were balm to Pen's sore heart. When both her mother and dad commented on the striking resemblance between Pen and her grandma the latter produced a miniature of herself at eighteen to prove matters. Pen frowned at the miniature. The lips had such a hard, aggressive, arrogant look. Grandma had been lovely at eighteen, but was far sweeter at sixty, Pen thought.

The remainder of the evening was spent listening to the sweet old lady relate incidents of her girlhood, and momentarily Pen forgot the sting of her hurt.

But when the lights in her own room were out and she sat listening to the spring breeze wave the tree branches about outside her window, she remembered with a deeper, more poignant hurt that Verne had called her Little Miss Show-off.

Verne! Verne! Verne! The amber eyes laughed at her. Mocked her. Why should he have the power to hurt her so? Yesterday she had been a carefree popular girl. Secure in the thought that she was a popular girl, anyhow. Now that had turned to ashes. It was true that she had pushed herself forward. Sally was painfully right. But she had thought that the only way to be popular! And now—

She rested her head on the window sill and gave way to the sobs she had stifled all evening. At first she thought she was crying only because she knew she was not popular at all. But when she had cried herself out she knew, through a strange calm, why she had really cried. Knew why his words had hurt her so. In a word Pen realized she was hopelessly, painfully in love with Verne.

It was then she decided she was through with parties—with the crowd. And because she loved Verne so deeply she hoped with all the sting of her newly awakened hot young pride that she would never, never see him again. And she fell asleep on the hundredth "never."

FOLLOWED queer days for Pen. True to her resolution, she refused all party invitations. And formal regrets were all that resulted. None of the girls dropped around for chummy chats. Nor, what hurt even worse, did the boys drop around to coax her back. The piano episode had evidently been her Waterloo.

Why, she hadn't been popular at all. She had been a silly little fool. Even Dick and Stuffy had deserted her. She doubted if she had one real friend in the whole crowd.

As naturally as flowers turn to the sun, Pen turned in her hurt to Grandma Dare. A sweet, rare friendship bloomed between them. Often Pen longed to pour out her heart to Grandma Dare, but still she hesitated. Against the feeling that her grandmother would understand loomed the fear that she might be laughed at.

So two weeks went by, bringing Pen to a Sunday afternoon when she and grandma went to pick white lilacs, which bloomed upon a near-by wooded hill in wild profusion.

Pen chattered of everything, her eyes shadowed. The day was so mellow, so filled with youthful promise it restored all her queer longing for the man who had stolen her heart and hurt her pride—Verne.

Grandma was a game hill climber, yet they were both a trifle breathless ascending this wooded incline. As they paused to rest the sun streaked across the figure of a man, leading a silver greyhound, descending the hill and coming directly toward them.

"My," said Grandma Dare admiringly, "there's a handsome lad. I'd have fancied him, Penelope, when I was your age."

Pen smothered a sob, unable to speak. The man was Verne.

She held on to grandma's arm very tightly, defiance trying to cover her quivering fear. Yes—actual fear. She marveled that she had ever dared fall off a piano into his arms.

There was no way of turning back. Useless to pray for the hill to open up and swallow her. She felt like a tiny girl as her heart pounded and her senses reeled.

His glance crossed hers with genuine interest. Surely, surely he wasn't going to stop and talk! Anything but that. But—yes—he was going to stop.

"Why, hello, Miss Dare," he greeted, smiling.

She introduced him, her voice shaky, her face burning and her hands icy cold.

"That climb has tired me out more than I thought, Penelope," said Grandma Dare. "Let's stop and sit on that fallen log and talk with this nice young friend of yours."

"I—I'm sure Mr. Mace is in a hurry, grandma," stammered Pen.

"On the contrary," he replied quickly, "I have all the time in the world."

Oh, he was beastly! Why didn't he go! He disliked her so, why should he wish to talk with her. She almost hated him as he pulled in his dog's leash and assisted grandma to a comfortable spot on the log.

"And what is the name of the lovely dog?" the old lady inquired.

"He boasts the name of Ruggles," Verne replied.

Now, somehow, he and grandma were chatting like old schoolmates! Both had traveled, visited many of the same spots. Besides they had dogs and baseball and many other topics in common to discuss.

It rather amazed Pen, as she sat on her side of the log, as forlorn and silent as a little mouse, listening intently to the musical sound of his voice, loving him against her will. Loving him so much she dared not even glance into his amber eyes. Had he attended any of the parties? Or missed the presence of the girl he called Little Miss Show-off, she wondered?

Finally grandma announced that the sun was getting toward the West and if they were to pick white lilacs they better be on their way.

Verne promptly volunteered.

Pen jumped to her feet quickly.

"I'll pick them, grandma, while you stay here with Mr. Mace—"

"I know," said Grandma Dare brightly, "I'll hold Ruggles while both of you young ones go up and pick them."

As Verne agreed, Pen ran on ahead, feeling smothered.

"Aren't you even going to wait for me, Miss Dare?" he called.

So she waited, eyes lowered, cheeks two bright flames, but she did not look at him. Her love had caused her to be as shy as a mountain deer. Anything now but a show-off!

IN silence they reached the hilltop. A golden radiance seemed to surround them as the rays of the sinking sun turned the hill to a lovely paradise.

"I'll pick them," he offered softly. "You stand by and catch them on the fly, Miss Dare."

She held the sweet, scented blossoms nervously, and each time he placed another one in her arms she thought her heart would stop at his nearness. When, at length, her arms were entirely filled with the blooms he regarded her with an engaging smile.

"If I were an artist," he complimented, "I'd love to paint you as is. You have no idea how lovely you look with those lilacs in your arms and the sun on your hair, Miss Dare. You remind me of a bewitching child."

Her flush went even deeper.

"Thank you," she murmured and half stumbled in a nervous rush to go back down the hill.

"Look out! I'd better help carry them."

"No." She buried her hot face within the coolness of the flowers, holding back the tears which trembled against her lids.

"Parties been boring you lately, Miss Dare?"

"No."

"Why decline the invitations?"

"Just because."

"Poor answer. Nobody else can give—imitations."

"Sorry."

"Nor fall off the piano." His tone was teasing now.

"Oh!"

"Well—you haven't told me why yet."

"I have been entertaining my grandma," very, very haughtily.

"I do not want your flattery! I happen to know what you think of me."

"That is a worthy excuse. Your grandma is very sweet, and I believe you resemble her considerably."

"I am *not* very sweet, Mr. Mace."

"I think you're very sweet, Miss Dare."

"Oh, no, you don't."

"What makes you doubt my word?"

A sudden quick, angry pride lashing her. A sudden tossing of the taffy-colored curls.

"I do not want your flattery, Mr. Mace. I happen to know what you think of me."

"Why—what do you mean?" he asked, but his lips went white.

"I overheard you and Sally discussing me. You called me several things—quite unflattering — among them Little Miss Show-off and smarty-cat girl. For that reason I don't care for your compliments—or, for that matter, your company, either."

Pride had now triumphed completely over love, but his amber eyes were as

angry as her own. He grasped her by the wrists and swung her about as she would have ran on ahead.

"Yes," he said, green flecks dancing in his eyes, "I did say those things—and if you overheard them you deserved to. You did show off that night and you know darned well you fell off that piano intentionally—and it made me mad clear through. But I'm sorry now—and I apologize—"

"I don't want your apology," she retorted, trying to pull away from the sweet pain of his fingers on her wrists and unable to do so without spilling the lilacs about.

"And you won't forgive me?"

She couldn't raise her eyes for fear of giving away the wild, unreckoning answer to his question. Forgive him! She loved him so. Yet pride was still stubborn and unsatisfied. Young and hot headed.

"I can't be bothered about it," she scoffed, "and please let go of my wrists at once."

"It's impossible to understand you," he said, not releasing her wrists. "You tried to make me notice you that night, and to-day you're determined to avoid me. Why?"

A sudden angry jerk and Pen was free, with but one lilac falling to the grass.

"Because I hate you! Hate you! Hate you!" she cried and ran back in a wild little rush.

She turned her eyes away and he took Ruggles from his sweet old keeper and said courteous things in farewell. With Ruggles held in leash he passed Pen. She would not look up at him.

"Good-by, Miss Dare. Pleasant, seeing you again."

Then grandma and Pen were walking down the hill, Pen's heart in a turmoil. Not once did she turn around. If she had she would have seen Verne still standing beside the fallen log, watching her rebellious little figure in puzzled amusement.

"Well, dog," he said, stroking Ruggles, "we misjudged her. And she isn't going to forgive us, it seems."

Before he left he stooped to retrieve the lilac bloom she had dropped and placed it in the pocket above his heart.

THE house was silent when they reached home, Pen's mother and father having gone to attend a meeting. Grandma was worried about Pen. The child had been so silent, so bruised and hurt looking on the walk back. What ailed her? Was it that nice young man? Pen appeared to be in love with him. A lover's fuss, perhaps?

She was certain of something being amiss when she passed Pen's room a few moments later and heard muffled sobs. Well—

Grandma pushed open the door and went in. She put gentle arms about the tiny figure huddled against the pillow, shaking with grief.

"I knew it was that nice young man," Grandma Dare said. "Wouldn't you like to tell me all about it, dear?"

"Oh! Oh! I can't bear it! I can't!" Pen choked out.

"You *are* in love with him," stated the soft old voice.

Pen straightened like a bolt of lightning.

"How—how do you know that, grandma?"

"I've been in love in my day, too, Penelope. He's a nice young man and he seemed to like you. What's the trouble? Tell grandma, child. Perhaps I can help."

"Like me?" gulped Pen, catching at that one phrase. "All he's ever

done is to—to make fun of me. He called me—Little—Miss Show-off and —smarty-cat girl—at—at a party."

"Well, child, that's rather cunning —calling you Little Miss Show-off—now if he had just said she's an old show-off—"

"Cunning? It's perfectly horrid!"

"Did he have any particular reason to call you those things, Penelope?"

Suddenly Pen gave in to the long stifled impulse to confide in Grandma Dare. She told her the whole story, not omitting the incidents which had given him cause to call her names.

"And now I see why you've been refusing all these party invitations and going about with an old lady. I see why you seemed so pensive that first night I met you."

"But I've really loved going about with you, grandma. And I—I—just couldn't face him—or them—after I knew what they all thought of me. And nobody has even missed me, and I didn't want to see him to-day. I—I—hate him—I do—so!"

"There, there," soothingly. "We always hate the man we love. And now if I told you of a way of returning to this crowd of yours and becoming really popular—and, incidentally, showing this nice young man a thing or two—would you be brave enough to try it?"

"I—I'd be brave enough to try it—but there isn't a way."

"Don't you go telling me there isn't a way, young lady. Long ago your grandma learned the difference between being a show-off and being really popular. What's more, if I hadn't learned the difference you might not even be here to-day, learning *your* lesson. For it was your grandpa I loved and nearly lost because of my smart-aleckness."

"Why—grandma." Pen's tears dried on her cheeks in the amazing thought that grandma, too, had once been a show-off! That accounted for the arrogant look of the miniature at eighteen!

"Every one wants to be popular, Penelope. Even the quietest girl in your crowd yearns to be the center of attention. To be loved, admired, sought after. Most of them are too shy, however, to woo popularity. Every so often along comes a girl such as I used to be and you are now—a girl who will do anything to attract attention. Usually she does just what you did—succeeds in making a bothersome show-off of herself and mistaking the attention she receives for honest admiration. That, as you can see now, is merely sham popularity. It proves itself when you say the crowd have dropped you since you refused to attend the parties."

"Yes, I know now it wasn't real popularity."

"Now, if you had been really popular and worked hard to deserve your place in the sun, that would not have happened. And the formula for being really popular, like everything worth while, is simple. Instead of being interested in Penelope, you should have been interested in the boys and girls around you. Instead of pushing yourself into the spotlight you should have turned the spotlight on them. In a word, Penelope, being really popular is merely a knack of trying to make every one else popular. You could easily lend that remarkable personality of yours toward helping every one else have a good time, toward being interested in their welfare, not your own. Every one is muddled and lonely and shy, dear. And if you tried to help your friends

overcome that I'll guarantee you'd be really loved, deserving of admiration, an honestly popular girl."

A sudden light in the hazel eyes of Pen. An understanding smile.

"Why, I believe you're right, grandma! I think I could do it, too. I'd like to try and see if—"

"Then why don't you, child? Don't be a quitter. It worked for me nearly forty-five years ago, and it will work just as well to-day!"

"There's a party to-night at Grace Sterling's." Pen's voice was wistful and dubious. "It came in the mail yesterday—the invitation. I might go—but how—how would I treat him, grandma, after telling him I hated him to-day?"

"Treat him just as you do the rest of those muddled, lonely young folks, anxious to have a good time. We're all anxious to be understood—from six to sixty, every generation of us. Try to understand this lad you love. Be friendly, natural, kindly toward him."

And the result was that Pen left that evening, a little after eight, for the party, resolved to test out Grandma Dare's formula.

Grandma smiled a wise little smile as she watched her go.

"Beats me," she said to herself, "how every one misunderstands this generation. Young troubles are always the same be it 1830 or 1930. All a body has to do is remember their own youth."

IN a general way the crowd were pleased to see the radiant Pen, clad in a long white lace and net dress, that night. And, as usual, at the very first dull moment Dick called out:

"C'mon, Pen, do your stuff."

Pen's smile was nearly as wise as Grandma Dare's as she answered:

"I'm going to be the pianist to-night. All you girls are going to be in my act. Grace, you're going to do Clara Bow! Sally, you always *did* look like Mary Pickford. Ruth is nearly Janet Gaynor's double—"

On and on, in like fashion Pen addressed all the surprised girls. She had expected some resistance. She found none. They took to the plan like eager kittens lapping up cream. With an unerring instinct Pen lined them up for the impromptu show, playing the musical accompaniment to each number, wondering eagerly if they liked her any better. It was really much more fun including everybody in the spotlight than it had been hogging it for herself. And the efforts of the girls were greeted with hoots.

Verne arrived in the midst of the hilarity.

"Ssh!" Stuffy informed him. "The girls are doing their imitations."

"Girls?" Pen heard Verne echo in astonishment. She felt his amber eyes seeking her out in the shadow of the piano. Her fingers grew shaky, slipped nervously over the keys. What was it grandma had said? Try and understand this boy you love.

So hard to act natural as he came and leaned across the piano. Bravely she raised her eyes.

"Hello," she said softly.

"Greetings, Miss Dare—and a thousand welcomes."

Grace was imitating Clara Bow. Pen tried to keep her mind on the song she played: "Eleven-thirty Saturday Night."

He seated himself beside her on the piano bench. Oh, how could she treat him naturally when his presence upset her so?

"Still—hate me, Pen?"

Pen. He was calling her Pen. Her

fingers shaking more and more. Hazel eyes watching Grace to keep her tempo.

"No—I—I'm sorry I spoke so hastily."

"Fine." His voice was warm, eager. "We'll be friends."

She brushed nervously past him when the girls had finished their act. She aided Dick and Tubby in lining up the boys. Tried never to glance at—Verne.

The boys gave even greater fun-provoking imitations. They were a knock-out to every one. Afterward a dancing contest was announced, with Pen and Stuffy as the judges.

Still Pen avoided Verne, because she loved him so dearly. When she was near him she didn't know what she was doing. And if you want to keep a crowd entertained and help them enjoy themselves you must know what you are doing.

When refreshments were served Pen was actually tired. She sat down beside each of the girls in turn, for inconspicuous little chats, instead of flinging wisecracks about as she had formerly done. To Sally she said:

"You look adorable in red. How have you been? Happy? Couldn't you and I go to the talkies alone some night, Sally? Have a nice, chummy talk. We haven't since we were children. I'll bet you'd have so much to tell me about you."

Sally was almost hungrily responsive.

All the girls bid Pen an appreciative good-by that night and all the boys wanted to see her home. She went with Dick.

IT was amazing how truly popular she became during the ensuing days. Dad threatened to muffle the telephone. Every night some young people cluttered across the Dare front porch. She had a million things to do, a million places to go. And the price of her popularity was—hard work. Being in demand at every party and dance to arrange things or put on entertainment is not all fun. One must pay a price for everything—even popularity.

Her time was never her own, yet the more she grew really interested in people the most she really enjoyed it. Yet for all her success there was a lonely, forlorn little ache in Pen's heart. She was still in love, you see.

After that first night when Verne had offered to be friends he became as indifferent to her as she tried to be toward him. It hurt—like everything. So she avoided him even more: always so afraid of showing her love, always so ashamed of once having flung herself into his arms. He hovered about in the background for the most part, silent and curious, distant and courteous, even on the nights he joined the others on Pen's front porch.

One evening after the crowd had played stump the leader, consumed fudge and had several harmony quartettes, Pen sat watching them disappear down the street, with a heavier heart than usual and tears behind her lids.

She was popular. The crowd honestly loved her. And it was such an empty triumph.

Suddenly she gave way to the hot tears and putting her head down on the porch swing sobbed aloud: "Verne—Verne—Verne—"

A shadow crossed the porch. Pen glanced up in amazement. There stood, in the flesh, the person she had been calling.

"Oh," she said, "you!"

"I came back for my ukulele."

"Oh, yes. I hadn't noticed it—there."

"Hardly. You couldn't while you were—crying." He sat down beside her on the porch swing.

"Why are you crying, Pen?"

Panic in her heart. Had he heard her call his name?

"It—it wasn't anything—of—of any account."

He studied her profile.

"Thanks, Pen, for the compliment."

"What do you mean?" Her eyes flew wide open in chagrin.

"For calling me no account."

"If you think I was crying over you—you're crazy."

"Well, you *were* crying over me—so there. I'm the only Verne who lives in Smithville, Pen."

"Oh, I hate you—I hate you!" she jumped to her feet, but once more he caught her by the wrists, pulling her gently back to the porch swing.

"You don't hate me, Pen, I'm certain of that, but one thing I can't understand is why you always avoid me."

"I—I don't avoid you," she struggled against his hold.

"Yes, you do, Pen. Is it because you can never forgive me for calling you Little Miss Show-off? Am I to be punished forever?"

"I'm not trying to punish you."

"Yes, you are. And, what's more, you're punishing yourself. That's why you were crying, sweetheart."

"It doesn't matter to you why I was crying!"

"Yes it does, Pen. It matters more than anything in the world. I think you're—wonderful. I love you, Pen."

All suddenly like this he was saying he loved her. It took her breath away. One hand flew from his hold to her throat.

"You—love me?"

"I loved you since the day I met you with your grandma. Since I saw you on that hill. You said you hated me, Pen, that day, but forgive me for seeing something in your eyes which belied your words, dear."

"You couldn't love a girl you called a show-off."

"You've proved how wrong I was, dear. Even if you hadn't, you were *my* Little Miss Show-off from the start, weren't you—Pen?"

Her lips would tremble, her eyes would tell the truth.

"Yes—I—do care. Oh, Verne, that's why it hurt so."

Quickly his arms slipped about her shoulders, his fingers caressing her bare arms.

"Poor little girl! My little girl!"

SUDDENLY Pen was frightened. He was going to kiss her! She was horribly afraid of that kiss—of his lips on hers. She longed terribly to run up and ask grandma about that. Why should she feel afraid of his lips coming nearer to hers, when she loved him until it hurt?

"Pen—say it—say you love me—" She was in a circle of ecstasy with the dear amber eyes tender above her. She trembled with fear, yet she knew were he to withdraw his arms she would have been desolate—alone. Love was so peculiar. So sweet, so vast, so overwhelming.

"Say it, sweetheart—now!"

"I love you, Verne," her voice quivered.

"Darling. Come closer, Pen. You're afraid, dear. Don't be afraid. Once you fell off the piano on purpose to be in my arms and now you're afraid. Funny darling!"

"I'm afraid—because—I love you so. Isn't that silly?"

"Put your arms around my neck, young lady."

"I—oh—"

"Do as I say, Pen."

Trembling she put her arms around his neck, found it queer that they felt perfectly at home there.

"Oh, you darling"—he ran his fingers through the taffy-colored curls—"You're so sweet—so sweet. Don't be afraid. I love you so—dearest."

Shyly she touched his lips and when he took that for a sign she was no longer afraid, his mouth pressed against hers in a long, gentle kiss. The world seemed to stand still to usher in the flame and the beauty of that moment.

"Oh, Verne, darling," she whispered, when his lips momentarily left hers, "I'll never be afraid—again. I love you and I feel safe—"

He held her tightly against his heart. "And you'll marry me, darling, and be—my—smarty girl—forever?"

"Your little—everything, Verne. I only wanted to be popular for you. That's how I learned the only way to be popular is to be interested in everybody—love everybody—"

"Nothing doing! You're *not* loving everybody. You're only loving me!"

"All right, Mr. Jealous—I'm only loving you, then. It didn't matter, anyhow, Verne, being popular. All that matters is just belonging to you."

"Little Miss Show-off—in love," he teased softly.

Pen's eyes were stars.

"I don't mind your calling me that—now. But it's just plain Miss—in love, Verne darling."

And the katydids who viewed the two on the front porch chirped their approval. They knew that all girls, show-offs, popular or otherwise are quite the same once they come home—to love.

Little Pillow of Balsam Sprays

LITTLE pillow of balsam sprays
From the Land of Pointed Firs,
Go whisper to him through wintry days
Of the gladness that was hers.

Let your colors show him the radiance
Of the flaming autumn trees;
Through you let him sense the fragrance
Of the soft pine-scented breeze.

And O you with glad memories thronging,
When you pillow that precious head,
Will you whisper, "There's one who is longing
It were on her breast instead!"

—*Elizabeth Montefiori*

Dolorez was humming: "You belong to me, I belong to you," with an ominous look at Stella

Tangled Threads

How was she to free their perfect love from the web that Fate had woven?

By Bertha Snow Adams

"DAUGHTER."

"Yes, mother dearest," and Stella Marden bent to kiss the sweet pale face on the pillow.

There was a little pause before the faint voice went on weakly:

"Some months ago the doctor told me I hadn't long to live, so I lost no time in providing for you, my darling. After I am laid to rest you are to go to your uncle George Preston, my only brother. Although I haven't seen him since I ran away from home to get

married, he has promised me to see that you are well taken care of. He is wealthy, and a widower, with one daughter about your own age whom he worships."

Came a spasm of pain during which the lovely girl kneeling at the bedside gently stroked the thin hand she held while blinding tears coursed down her cheeks.

By and by the tired voice resumed more faintly still.

"But there is one thing more I must do before I leave you, daughter dear. I must tell you my story. Often since I learned my stay with you was to be very short, I have tried to force myself to do so, yet always my heart shrank before the memories which came crowding out of those far-away unhappy days of the past. Now I feel that the end is near and I must speak.

"I was barely seventeen when I became madly infatuated with a young artist. My father learned of it and forbade me ever to see him again. I disobeyed, and for a time we met secretly. Then one day we eloped and were married. It all proved to be a terrible mistake, for my artist husband soon tired of me. A year after our marriage you were born, but six weeks before you came he went away, leaving me penniless among strangers, and I never saw or heard from him again."

The dimming eyes closed as if to shut out ghosts of bygone sorrows, and when the tired voice spoke once more it was so faint that Stella had to lean closer to catch the halting words.

"I was too proud to ask help of my father, so for three years I struggled to support myself and baby, and it was a bitter struggle, for I wasn't at all strong. About that time I met John Marden, and when he later asked me to be his wife, I consented. To the day of his death he was the best of husbands to me, and he couldn't have been a kinder father to you had you been his own child. You were so young we thought it best to let you grow up as Stella Marden, but that isn't your real name. Your own father's name was—"

A second spasm of pain passed over the worn face and again the eyelids fluttered down. Stella put her ear close to the slightly parted lips. "Yes, mother darling," she whispered. "My own father's name was—"

With bated breath she listened, but no answer came. The wavering spark of life in her mother's frail body had flickered out.

TWO weeks later Stella alighted from the train at the exclusive Boston suburb where her millionaire uncle, George Preston, resided. Hardly had she stepped upon the station platform than a smart coupé dashed up beside it and a young man sprang out.

"You're Stella Marden, aren't you?" he inquired pleasantly, and without waiting for an answer, hurried on. "I came to meet you because there didn't seem to be anybody else who could. Your uncle was suddenly called to Mexico on urgent business. He left by airplane three hours ago, and Bubbles is having one of her week-end parties to-morrow, which means she is snowed under, getting ready, so I volunteered to escort you to your new home. I'm Jerry Ainsworth," he added by way of introduction.

Stella watched him as he deftly swung the car from one tree-lined boulevard into another. How good-looking he was. How different from the young men in the little mid Western town she had just left.

All at once he turned his head and their glances met. Something strangely sweet stirred within her. Something she had never felt before. Her cheeks burned with a surge of warm color.

"Did you say my cousin Ambrozine is having a week-end party?" she asked to cover her confusion.

"Yes, and it's going to be some party!" he laughed. "But for the love of Pete, don't call her Ambrozine unless you wish to make a mortal enemy of her. She hates the name, and nobody uses it. When you see her you'll agree that the nickname Bubbles suits her to a T."

As they approached one of the many fine homes which lined the street a girl stepped from behind a clump of shrubbery. Jerry waved to her, and motioning him to stop, she ran gracefully out to the curb as he drew up beside it.

"Hello, Jerry darling! Who's the new girl friend?" she cried vivaciously yet with a trace of real concern underlying her breezy manner that did not escape Stella's notice.

"This is the cousin Bubbles has been talking about," Jerry answered. "Miss Stella Marden. Stella, this is Dolorez Damon."

"Oh, yes, I believe I do remember hearing Bubbles speak of you," Dolorez responded, accepting Stella's outstretched hand the while her dark eyes appraised its giver from head to foot, then swept back to the flower-like face. There was an only half-veiled challenge in those lovely flashing eyes.

Stella, free from any trace of guile, did not perceive it, yet she somehow felt vaguely uncomfortable before that coldly calculating gaze and turned her head away to find Jerry regarding Dolorez with frank admiration. An odd little pang shot through her. Did he care for Dolorez?

"You'll be at the house party, of course?" the girl was saying, her full red lips curving in a warm smile as she turned to Jerry.

"Try and keep me away," he dared laughingly as he started the car.

A few moments later they rolled up a broad driveway and stopped before a palatial residence set in the midst of spacious lawns and gardens.

"Here we are," Jerry announced as he helped her from the car and led the way up a flight of marble steps to a great door which was presently opened by a butler.

THEY had no more than passed into a large, dimly lighted hall than a voice cried gayly, "Hello, country cousin!" and a girl came bounding out of the shadows to throw her arms about Stella's slender waist. She was the embodiment of daintiness—perhaps five feet two in height, and as petite of build as she was of stature. A wealth of chestnut hair framed a small piquant face out of which a pair of dancing eyes met the world with a laugh. Her diminutive proportions contrasted sharply with her cousin's five feet seven inches of slim perfection.

"You beautiful thing!" Bubbles exclaimed after a brief space, during which they stood surveying each other in silence. "Aren't you going to speak to me or kiss me or anything?"

"Of course I am, you darling little elf!" Stella cried, returning the embrace with interest. "And I'm going to love you with all my heart, too," she added impulsively. "Oh, Ambro—I mean Bubbles, I'm so glad you're going to like me, and want me here. I've worried a lot for fear you might not."

"As if anybody could help liking

and wanting you," Jerry put in before Bubbles had a chance to answer, and again that strangely sweet something flooded Stella's heart.

Bubbles turned to him and lightly patted his arm. "Thanks a lot for playing chaperon, old dear. Run along, now, like a good boy. Stell and I have worlds of things to talk about."

At that moment the butler announced a call for her, and with a brief "wait till I come back," she flew to answer it.

"You'll be at the party to-morrow night?" Jerry questioned as he took Stella's hand.

"I—I don't believe so," she told him. "I've just lost my mother, you know, and—"

"It was Dolorez," Bubbles announced, whirling back to them. "She wants to know if you'll drive her into town, Jerry? Says her car's on the blink, and she's dated up for a dinner dance."

"Sure I'll drive her in!" Jerry acquiesced; "but it's early yet—"

"Never mind how early it is," Bubbles broke in. "She's in a big hurry, and says for you to come right over, so be off with you!" and putting both hands on his broad back, she pushed him toward the door. "Come on, Stell, I'll take you to your room," she called as the outer door closed, and Stella was led up a wide staircase to a dainty chamber next her cousin's.

Although they talked steadily for an hour or so, Stella's thoughts often strayed to Jerold Ainsworth and at last she found courage to ask: "Are Jerry and Dolorez sweethearts?"

"Looks like it," Bubbles answered. "He's been stepping her a lot the last couple of months, and the other day she told me she'd have something to tell the world before long, so I suppose it's her engagement announcement."

"She reminds me of pictures I've seen of Spanish *señoritas*," Stella said with an odd little catch in her voice.

"She is—partly, at least," Bubbles stated. "Her father went to Argentina and married a lovely Spanish girl. Dolorez is even more beautiful than her mother was, they say, and she's as rich as she is beautiful. I'm awfully fond of her. All the same, I wouldn't like to be in the way of anything she wanted a lot."

"Why not?" Stella inquired.

"Oh, you know how the Spanish are—hot-tempered and cruel and revengeful," Bubbles rattled on. "Dolorez is terribly fascinating and all that, but she has claws when she wants to use them. I've never felt them, but I know one or two who have."

STELLA was not one of the merry-makers at her cousin's week-end party. The loss of her mother was still too fresh in her mind. She shut herself in her room and tried hard to pretend she wasn't homesick and terribly lonely. Snatches of gay talk and ripples of laughter drifted up to her, seeming to intensify her feeling that she was quite alone in the world.

At last, unable to endure it any longer, she threw on a light wrap and stole down the back stairs and on out into the garden. Making her way to an arbor at the far edge, she sank down upon a rustic bench and once more surrendered to a surge of utter loneliness.

Yet, despite her stealthy departure, she had been seen by two pairs of watchful eyes, and one pair of these, filled with smoldering fire, trailed the athletic figure which presently followed her.

"Why do you hide away like this?"

a deep voice questioned half reproachfully, and Jerry Ainsworth dropped down on the bench, letting his arm rest along the back. "Everybody's asking Bubbles about you," he went on. "Why don't you come to the party for a few minutes at least?"

"I'm so sorry if it seems rude of me not to," Stella told him. "I'd thought of doing that, but—but—" Her lip quivered a bit. "All the girls are wearing such exquisite evening gowns, and I—I haven't any," she confessed falteringly.

Jerry made an impatient gesture, then took the slim hand which lay on the bench beside him. "It takes clothes to make some girls, but not you," he stated emphatically. "In the poorest rags imaginable you'd look like a princess!" His clasp on her hand tightened and he leaned closer, searching her upturned face. "One of the poets has a line that just fits you, little girl," he murmured a bit breathlessly. "You are

> "Fair as a star when only one
> Is shining in the sky."

His arm slipped from the back of the seat to encircle her, gently drawing her to him. For a moment she was very still, enthralled by a delicious sense of sweet security and satisfied longing. His warm breath was upon her cheek and she felt his lips seeking hers. Suddenly she remembered and freed herself with such violence that he was taken aback.

"Oh, you mustn't! You mustn't!" she cried.

"Why mustn't I?" he demanded.

Stella regarded him scornfully. "I had hoped I should never meet a man so false-hearted he would try to make love to one girl when he was engaged to another," she said coldly.

"But I'm not engaged to any one!" Jerry declared with some heat. "Who ever put that idea into your head?"

"O-oh!" There was unmistakable relief in Stella's tone. "Bubbles told me that while it hadn't been announced yet, you were secretly engaged to Dolorez Damon."

Jerry gave a queer sound intended for a laugh. "Bubbles was never more mistaken in her life!" he exclaimed. "Dolorez is charming, and I like her immensely. But I'm not a wee bit in love with her. She isn't my style."

"O-oh!" Stella breathed again, and after a tense little silence, "W-what is your type of girl like?" she asked softly.

Once more he took her hand and drew her close. "Like you, sweet and unassuming and altogether artless," he whispered. "Now, beautiful star of my heart, will you come back to the place that will always be yours, and yours alone?" Eagerly he held out his arms to her.

An instant she hesitated. Could this be real, or was it all some heavenly madness brought on by the magic of the night? All at once something stronger than her will to resist swept her into those sheltering arms and held her blissfully content there while his lips caressed her hair, her drooping lids, her cheeks, at last coming to rest upon her own in a kiss so tenderly passionate that the uttermost depths of her responded in pulsing little thrills of ecstasy.

"I love you, my darling. I love you," Jerry breathed over and over again.

"But—but you've seen me only once, Jerry dear," she protested, eager to believe, yet half doubting that it could be true.

"I've seen you at least ten times a

day for nearly a month!" he contradicted with a low laugh. "Your mother sent a picture of you to your uncle. Bubbles showed it to me and—well, I stole it long enough to have it copied. Ever since it has stood on the table by my bed, where I could look at it the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night."

She turned her head, then sprang up. "Jerry!"

"And you aren't the least bit disappointed in the original?" Stella asked dreamily.

"Disappointed!" he echoed. "Why, precious, you are a thousand times lovelier than the picture, if that's possible." Yearningly he gazed down into her face, radiant in the flood of soft moonlight. "I don't believe you have any idea how exquisite you are, dearest," he whispered rapturously. "Just wait till dad gets a look at you! He's an artist, you know. He'll want to paint your picture the minute he lays eyes on you—"

Out of near-by shadows a rich contralto voice came to them. "You belong to me, I belong to you," it sang feelingly, and the next moment Dolorez Damon was beside them. "Aren't you treating your hostess rather shabbily, Jerry, running away from her party like this?" she inquired sweetly. "You were to have danced the last dance with Bubbles, you know. She let you off without a murmur, but the next dance is mine, and I'm not going to be so easy."

Although the words were lightly spoken, Stella detected the anger that lurked just below the surface and recalled what Bubbles had said about the claws Dolorez used when it suited her.

Jerry rose at once. "I'm afraid I have been terribly ungallant, but I'm sure Bubbles will forgive me. You

will, too, won't you, lovely *señorita?*" and he made Dolorez a courtly bow.

"Perhaps — this once," she agreed, slipping her arm through his and drawing him toward the house. Jerry took Stella's arm and together the three strolled through the garden to the side veranda. Here Bubbles spied her forgetful partner, and pretending to be furious, carried him off to make a public apology on his knees, from the top of a convenient table.

Until then Dolorez had not noticed Stella, but now she whirled upon her with flashing eyes. "Whoever started that rot about country girls being so innocent, hadn't met you," she said softly. "Now listen. The words I sang out there in the garden were meant for Jerry, and they were true, as he knows perfectly well. So be careful." With this warning she turned and swept gracefully into the house, leaving Stella to stand like one in a daze for a few uncertain seconds. Then she, too, turned and hurried into the house, eager now for the solitude of her own room once more, where she could dream of a future which had suddenly become very bright indeed.

THE week that followed was full of thrilling experiences for Stella. There were many visits to exclusive dressmakers and milliners, lingerie and shoe shops, for Bubbles insisted that her cousin must have an entirely new wardrobe.

"You look like all the money in the world, darling!" she exclaimed enthusiastically when at last Stella stood before her attired in Dame Fashion's latest decrees. "Helen of Troy wouldn't have a ghost of a show beside you!"

But most thrilling of all were the hours spent with Jerry Ainsworth. They were together nearly every evening. Stella begged off a little longer from the theater parties and dinner dances and other gay amusements which kept Bubbles on the go much of the time. Instead, she and Jerry took long drives through the delightful Boston suburbs, sometimes stopping for a simple meal at an inn tucked away off the beaten track.

"Bubbles says all the gang is wondering why you're passing them up lately, Jerry dear," Stella told him as they had tea on a balcony overlooking the Charles River.

"Let 'em wonder," he replied contentedly. "I wouldn't have missed one minute of the time I've spent alone with you, sweetheart, for a year of their company." He reached across the table to imprison in his big one the small hand that lay beside her plate. "Until you are ready to go in for social functions, I shall cut them out also, and you and I will have these wonderful twosomes in lovely out of the way spots like this," he murmured, feasting his eyes upon the delicate beauty of her averted face.

One morning when Stella had been in her new home about ten days, Bubbles burst into her room in a flutter of excitement. "I've decided to have Ainsworth do a picture of me as a birthday present for daddy!" she cried. "I'm sure nothing would please him more. Come on into town with me, honey. Jerry's crazy to have you meet his old man, and this is your chance."

"What is Jerry's father like?" Stella inquired as they were driving into Boston an hour later.

"Oh, he's very distinguished looking and very dignified and very famous," Bubbles answered carelessly. "Jerry isn't his own son, you know. It seems that a close friend of Mrs. Ains-

worth died, leaving an orphan boy six years old, and she adopted him. Jerry adores her and his father—well, he's as proud as a peacock of him. They're regular pals."

The celebrated artist received them almost immediately upon their arrival at his studio. "And this, I presume, is the cousin who has come to live with you, and whose praises my son has been singing ever since he first met her," he said, turning to take Stella's hand after he had greeted Bubbles. He stood gazing at her, and Stella thought she saw a baffled look come into his eyes—a where-have-I-seen-you-before expression. It passed in a moment, and he again turned to Bubbles. "Go in and get ready. I'll be with you shortly," he instructed.

"You'll have to amuse yourself with pictures and magazines until he is through with me," Bubbles remarked as she vanished into an inner room.

Meanwhile the artist had stepped into an alcove, leaving the heavy draperies which shut it off, slightly parted. Stella heard the rapid turning of pages for a brief space, then all was quiet. Chancing to glance over her shoulder she saw John Ainsworth just inside the parted curtains. He was holding a large folio, and seemed to be comparing some picture it contained with her reflection in a full-length mirror opposite. Presently he came from the alcove and hurried on into the inner room without a word.

Picking up a magazine, Stella tried to read, but her thoughts kept wandering. Why had John Ainsworth looked so queer when he saw her? Did she remind him so forcibly of some one that it startled him? And was that some one's picture there in the alcove?

At length she rose, bent on satisfying her curiosity. She had gone halfway through the folio when suddenly one hand clutched at her throat and she swayed unsteadily. For, gazing up at her from the page was her mother's face, the lips smiling, the eyes wistfully tender.

An instant she stood looking into that dear familiar face, then everything went gray before her and she sank to her knees beside the stand on which the folio rested. "Mother! Mother! Mother!" she moaned under her breath.

How long Stella knelt there in the little alcove she never knew; but when at length she struggled to her feet the bright world in which she had moved for so short a time had vanished, and in its place was one which held only bitterness and shattered dreams.

Getting into her wraps she noiselessly let herself out of the studio and sped to the elevator. She must go away—away where they would never find her. None of them must ever know, especially Jerry. It wasn't his fault. How should he know that this man he admired above all others, and of whom he spoke so proudly, was a wolf in sheep's clothing—that he had deserted a frail young wife at a time when none save the most cold-blooded of brutes would have forsaken her? No, Jerry mustn't ever know the terrible truth about his adopted father. He shouldn't ever know it through her! She would just disappear, change her name and go to work at something—anything.

Oblivious of all except her own despairing thoughts, Stella hurried along the street. At a busy corner a knot of other pedestrians waited for the signal to cross, but she paid no heed to them, and reaching the curb, stepped out directly into the stream of traffic. Came

the grinding of brakes, women's screams, men's curses. A score of hands made frantic grabs at her, but it was too late. She was struck down by a car whose driver was unable to avoid hitting her.

"SHE'LL be all right in a few minutes. Just sit here with her until she is able to be taken home," were the first words Stella caught as she drifted back to consciousness. A door closed.

Slowly she opened her eyes. "Where am I?" she asked faintly.

"In a doctor's office," replied a familiar voice, and turning her head she saw Dolorez Damon seated by the couch on which she lay. "You're a lucky girl to get off with only a couple of broken ribs," Dolorez informed her. "You're lucky, too, that my car happened to be just behind the one that hit you. Otherwise they'd have carted you off to a hospital. As it was, they turned you over to me, and I rushed you in here. As soon as you feel like it, I'll take you home."

Home. Home. The words echoed mockingly through Stella's brain as memory carried her back to the tiny alcove in John Ainsworth's studio. "I haven't any home," she murmured weakly, slow tears coursing down her cheeks.

"Well, your uncle's home, then," Dolorez supplemented, "but where is Bubbles? Surely you didn't come in to town alone!"

With a quick little movement Stella caught the older girl's hand. "I know you don't like me, Dolorez," she sobbed, "but please be my friend. I haven't any one else to turn to, and I'm in trouble."

Through narrowed lids Dolorez studied her closely. "Of course I'll be your friend. What has happened?" she questioned, trying not to seem too eager. For it had occurred to her that Stella and Jerry must have quarreled, and she could hardly wait to have her suspicion verified.

"Don't ask me," Stella pleaded. "It's too horrible to tell anybody. I'm not going back to my uncle's home—I can't! I'm going away where nobody knows me and try to take care of myself. Won't you help me to do this and promise me you'll never let a soul know that you have seen me?" Desperately she clung to the hand she was still holding. "Won't you, Dolorez?" she begged.

Dolorez did not answer at once. Her mind was working, and working fast. All her life her every wish had been granted. Now she wanted Jerold Ainsworth more than anything else in the whole world, and this small town nobody was taking him away from her. With Stella out of the way she could win him back. Why shouldn't she help the girl to drop out of sight?

"I can't imagine what it's all about, but if you really want me to, of course I'll help you," she said sweetly. "Do you feel able to go now? If so I'll have the car brought around. We'll drive to some quiet place for a bit of luncheon, where we can have a private room and talk things over."

Some time later they were whirling along a country road to an isolated farm hidden among wooded hills. Skillfully Dolorez had sought to draw from Stella her reason for wishing to disappear, but without success, and she was too wise to let her curiosity get the best of her. Outwardly, she pretended to disapprove of Stella's determination to leave the home of her uncle, yet inwardly she rejoiced. A daring scheme was shaping itself in

her mind, and with well-feigned reluctance she finally brought it forth.

"Since I can't stop you from carrying out your plan, I'll stand by you, honey," she declared at length. "It's heart-breaking to see you so unhappy. First of all, you must have a good rest, and somebody to mother you. I'll take you to a place I know of where you will get it. They're old country folks, and Mrs. Van Beek is a jewel. Right now you look as if you'd been through a long illness, but she'll have you looking like a rose in no time. While you're resting I'll get in touch with a friend of mine. She has had a nervous breakdown, and her mother is taking her on a round the world trip. She wants a girl about your age to go along as a companion to Evelyn, and I'm sure you'll just fill the bill. The salary is good, and you will be gone a year. How does that sound?"

Crushed as she was, it sounded to Stella like the only way out of an unbearable situation. "You're so kind to me, Dolorez dear," she said chokingly. "I shall never forget you, and perhaps some day I can do something to show you how much I appreciate—"

"Forget it," Dolorez interrupted gently, patting her hand. "You're so adorable. Who could help being kind to you?" To herself she was saying exultantly, "A whole year! A whole year! Anything can happen in a year!"

IT was late in the evening of the day Stella had so mysteriously vanished from John Ainsworth's studio, and Bubbles was in a state of collapse. At first she had treated the matter lightly. When she came back to the reception room and found her cousin gone, she had laughingly exclaimed, "Jerry has pulled a fast one on me, the wretch! He was to call and take us both to luncheon, but he has slipped in and carried Stella off without me. Just wait until I lay hands on him!"

She had hardly finished speaking, however, when Jerry came and soon convinced her that he hadn't seen Stella, and knew absolutely nothing of her whereabouts. Search for her was begun at once. But the long hours dragged by, bringing no clew to the mystery. Stella seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Jerry's face had become drawn and white, and he seemed not to hear when spoken to. As for Bubbles, she had at length become hysterical, and was curled up on a couch sobbing wildly when her maid brought word that Jerry wished to see her at once.

"Dad found this on the floor of the alcove," he said, holding up a picture as she came flying into the room. "It looks enough like Stella to be her own portrait, though it isn't, of course. Dad told me he bought it years ago from an artist he met in Paris, who had great ability, but was dissolute, and dying of tuberculosis. It's all tear-stained, you see, and while we can't think what it could possibly be, both dad and I feel certain Stella's going is in some way connected with this picture. I brought it, hoping you might know something about it. Do you?"

Bubbles sank down on a chair, the small exquisite painting spread on her lap. "Yes, I know all about it," she said after a tense little silence, during which Jerry watched her with bated breath. "It's the portrait of daddy's only sister, and Stella's mother. There's a photograph taken when she was a year or so younger upstairs in his desk, and he told me her story when he got a letter from her shortly before her death. The family had lost all track of her until then. She ran away

from home to marry an artist who proved to be a worthless sort. He abandoned her just before Stella was born. No doubt it was he from whom your father bought this painting."

Bubbles raised moist eyes to Jerry's face. "Don't you understand now why the poor child has gone away?" she half sobbed. "I do," and as Jerry met her questioning gaze with one of puzzlement, she hurried on. "It's because she doesn't see any other way to spare you. She came across this picture, and quite naturally jumped to the conclusion that John Ainsworth was her father, and to save you from learning what she believes to be the truth about him, she has—

A groan of anguish from Jerry cut her short. He, too, now sank into a chair, burying his face in his hands. "My poor darling. My poor heart-broken darling," he murmured huskily.

"I've got to get word to daddy and tell him to come home at once," Bubbles announced in a small tired voice.

Jerry sprang to his feet and squared his broad shoulders. "Not just yet—please," he begged. "Leave everything to me, won't you? I'll find her if it takes every dollar I have!"

Early next morning one of Boston's cleverest private detectives was at work on the case; yet that day passed, and the next, bringing no trace of the missing girl. It was as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up.

Worn and haggard, and almost beside himself with fear for the safety of his sweetheart, Jerry was once more on his way to comfort Bubbles, who by now was completely unstrung. As he passed the Damon home, Dolorez beckoned to him from the front porch, and reluctantly he answered her summons.

"You used to be so nice to me, big boy, and now I hardly ever see you any more," she pouted prettily. "Stay and talk to me a while like a dear. I'm lonesome."

"Sorry, but I can't. I have an appointment," Jerry told her.

She came close, and slipping a lovely bare arm around his neck, looked up at him with soft, appealing eyes. "Don't be horrid, darling," she pleaded. "I'm so—so fond of you. Are you really so crazy about that little country nobody that you can't see any one else?"

"She's not a nobody!" Jerry defended hotly. "She's the sweetest girl in all the world, and I'm going to marry her."

Dolorez drew away, her cheeks aflame with anger. "You'll have to find her first, won't you?" she mocked. The next instant she could have bitten her tongue out. The words had escaped her involuntarily.

Jerry stared at her, and she saw suspicion waken in his gaze. "How did you know she was lost?" he inquired, and her own gaze shifted under his sharp scrutiny.

"Is it such a great secret?" she parried.

He sprang to her side and caught hold of her wrist. "Dolorez, answer me! Where is she? You know. I'm sure of it. Tell me this minute! Where is she?"

With a scornful laugh Dolorez wrenched herself from his grasp. "Since when have you had a right to order me to do things, Jerry Ainsworth?" she panted. Her anger was at white heat now, and her eyes flashed dangerously. "Suppose I do know where Stella is?" she went on, her voice tense with passion. "I'm not going to tell, and nobody can make me.

She doesn't ever want to see you again. She told me so herself."

"That's because she thinks she has learned something which will make me unhappy," Jerry explained. "Oh, Dolorez, don't be so cruel! Tell me where she is. I must see her at once and tell her it's all a mistake."

"You'll never see her through any help of mine," Dolorez retorted coldly, then yielding to a fresh surge of anger, she cried, "I hate you, Jerry Ainsworth—oh, how I hate you!" and dashed madly into the house, slamming the door behind her.

A few minutes later Jerry reached the Preston residence, but before going upstairs to Bubbles, he stepped into the telephone booth at the end of the hall and gave a number. "Watch Dolorez Damon," he instructed the detective who answered his call. "Keep tabs on her every movement. She knows where Stella Marden is. Get in touch with me the instant you find anything."

LONG shadows wavered upon the grass as Stella Marden threaded her way among the paths of Mrs. Van Beek's well-tended garden to a wide seat which encircled a big cherry tree. Her eyes were upon the old-fashioned flowers nodding good night to the setting sun, but her thoughts were far away. That morning Dolorez had come to say that everything had been arranged more quickly than she expected. In a few days they would go to the home of her invalid friend, where Stella would remain until the party sailed for Europe.

Stella's lip quivered as she pictured herself in the midst of strangers once more. Soon now, she would be borne across the ocean to a foreign shore. As the days slipped by it grew harder and harder to go on with her plan, and yet she must go on. It was the only way. There was no turning back. Oh, how cruel life was! If only she might go to sleep and never waken—

There was a step on the path. She turned her head, then sprang up. "Jerry!" she gasped, and would have fallen at his feet had he not caught her in his arms.

"My darling. My darling," he breathed, straining her to him the while his lips clung to hers.

Gently he drew her down on the seat and held her very close. "Listen, sweetheart," he said. "You thought you had learned something which would make it hard for both of us, but you were mistaken. The picture of your mother you found at the studio is one dad bought many years ago from a penniless artist he met in Paris who was dying."

Stella gazed up at him, her lovely eyes wet with tears.

"Oh, the hours of misery I might have spared you if I hadn't acted so hastily," she murmured. "Can you ever forgive me, Jerry dearest?"

"Forgive you?" he whispered tenderly, and again his lips sought hers.

"It's so sweet to be in your arms once more, and to hear you say you love me," Stella murmured by and by. "But how did you know I was here, Jerry darling?"

"All that can wait until later," he answered. "Right now I'm so hungry for kisses I can't stop to tell you about it. Promise me you'll never leave me again, beloved."

"Never! Never! Never!" she promised, nestling closer to him, while his arms gathered her home.

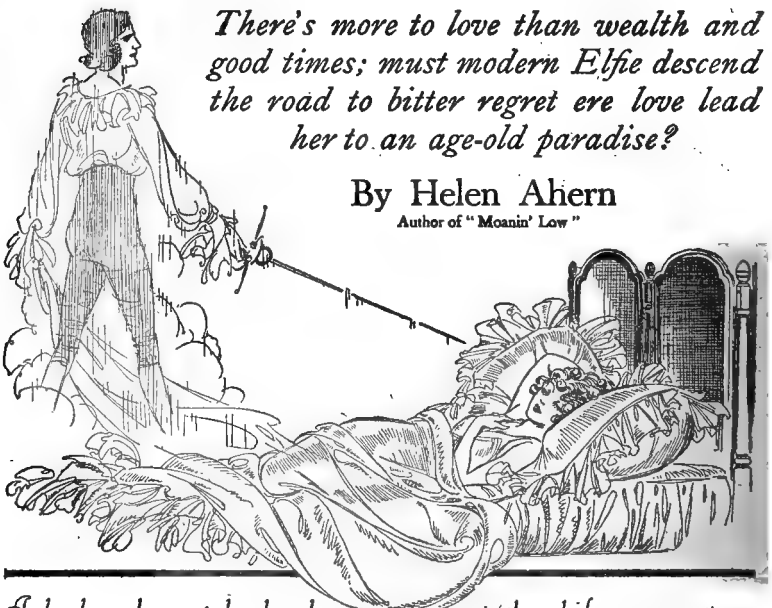
"We'll be married to-day, and I'll love you all the rest of my life, my beloved. Oh, Stella!"

The Prince in Waiting

There's more to love than wealth and good times; must modern Elfie descend the road to bitter regret ere love lead her to an age-old paradise?

By Helen Ahern

Author of "Moanin' Low"



In her dreams he came to her, dressed in the garb of a more romantic age

"AFRAID? Of course I'm not afraid, you blessed child." Elfie Masters's gay, silvery laugh tinkled across the dainty, old-fashioned bedroom as she fastened the last strap on her week-end bag. "After all, I don't eat with my knife, and my clothes are passable."

"Yes, but the Waldrons are so very, *very!*"

"Sally!" Mrs. Masters spoke her youngest daughter's name in a softly reproachful voice. "Please remember that the Masters had nothing to be ashamed of. Elfie's great grandfather was a Governor of the State and your Uncle John . . ."

"Was a Congressman." Pert, fifteen-year-old Sally giggled. "Poor, but proud, that's us."

"A good family is nothing to ridicule." A troubled look crossed her mother's delicate, patrician face. Mrs. Masters, with her air of hollyhocks and

crinolines, was always puzzled by flippancy. "I'm sure Elfie will acquit herself successfully on this visit."

"Thanks for them kind words, old sweet thing." Elfie blew a kiss at her mother and strolled over to the dressing table mirror for a final, anxious survey of her own slim loveliness.

For a year, now, Elfie had assisted her mother in the tea room that occupied the lower floor of the rambling old Masters's house, and she had watched the smart young things who made up the Beach Club set. She knew what they wore at various hours, and had adapted her own wardrobe accordingly for this all important visit.

Every detail had been carefully chosen. A soft, hyacinth blue felt hat was pulled down over her pale gold hair at just the right casual angle. Slim, low-heeled oxfords encased her small feet, and a trim, knitted suit, the exact shade of hyacinth in the hat, molded her slender young body. She looked just what she was, a girl bound for a fashionable country house party.

Elfie's violet eyes rested on the huge, square-cut diamond that adorned her left hand. It was visible proof of Larry Waldron's love, and made the prospect of meeting his wealthy family less formidable.

"If the Waldrons give you the fishy eye, come on back and take Nev Brant." Sally's words were lightly spoken, but there was an undertone of seriousness that made Elfie look at her sharply.

"Where'd you get the idea Nev was mine for the taking?"

"Womanly intuition." Sally's impish, child-like face assumed a precocious wisdom. "He's gaga about you, but naturally he won't cut in when his millionaire cousin is the fair-haired boy in the case."

"Mother, she's been seeing too many movies." Elfie laughed. Then to Sally: "You'd better hurry and grow up, so you can marry Nev yourself."

"No chance," dolefully. "He's one of those strong, silent men, who nourish hopeless passions. He'll always be in love with you."

"Sweet essence of apple sauce!" Elfie scoffed gayly; but she felt a trifle uncomfortable. All at once she remembered the curiously stricken look that had leaped to Neville Brant's dark eyes the night she had showed him her diamond.

"I hope you'll be very happy, Elfie," he had said with a smile that somehow hurt. "And think of me once in a while, won't you? Our friendship has been the sweetest thing I've ever known."

ELFIE wondered for a moment if that intimate, grave friendship between them might not have developed into something deeper had there been no Larry, fair and gay and conquering. At one time she had thought Neville Brant the handsomest man she had ever known, with his tall, athletic frame, his steady dark eyes and finely molded lips.

She used to watch for him to come into the tea shop for luncheon from the near-by flying field where he worked as combination mechanic and pilot. That smile of his would lighten the whole day.

By one of life's ironic twists, it was Nev who had introduced Larry to Elfie. "My cousin, Mr. Waldron."

Even in that first meeting, Elfie had been dazzled by Larry. Blond, broad shouldered, with the bluest of blue eyes and the whitest of white teeth, he was the man every girl dreams of.

"He hits you like a mammy song," Elfie told Sally later.

Two cousins were never more unlike than Larry and Neville. Perhaps wealth made the difference, thought Elfie. Larry had the gayety and confidence that was associated with imported roadsters and London-made suits, while hard-working Nev was quiet and unassuming. It had taken Nev six months to become Elfie's friend. It took Larry six weeks to slip a diamond engagement ring on her slim finger.

"Your hero comes!" Sally cried suddenly, and sprang to a dramatic pose as a car screamed to a stop in the driveway below.

Elfie's moodiness dropped from her. She ran down the stairs on small, flying feet.

"Bootiful!" Larry bounded to meet her, his eyes a sparkle with admiration. Elfie felt the quick stir of pride that he never failed to arouse in her. He looked unbelievably handsome as he stood there in the dusky tea room. His fair head bent toward her and she lifted tantalizing red lips.

"Isn't she the most divine thing?" Larry encircled her with a possessive arm and turned to his companion, a tall man with an aquiline profile and deep set dark eyes.

"Oh, 'lo, Nev." Elfie realized contritely that in the excitement of seeing Larry, she had not noticed Neville Brant. She tried to make up for her omission by a radiant smile, but for once Nev was irresponsive. His sensitive lips were set in a straight, hard line as he bowed low. It was a gesture that somehow suggested a bygone era of swords and roses.

"I can hardly wait to spring you on the family," Larry chattered on, oblivious of any strain in the atmosphere. "You'll take 'em like Capone took Chi."

Elfie laughed, glad of his unfailing gayety. "You're such a comfort. I have horrible premonitions of frosty glances."

"Larry's family will welcome you with gratitude," Neville said unexpectedly.

"Now, was that nice?" Larry turned to his cousin in mock reproach. "What he means is that the pater and mater, ever since I got shipped from college, live in constant fear that I'll bring home a chorine."

"Or a divorcée." Neville's tone was just a trifle too serious for banter. For an instant the two men's glances crossed. Then Larry grinned.

"Divorcées are my mother's pet peeve," he said to Elfie lightly; "ever since dad had an affair with one and got rimmed for a hundred grand heart balm."

"How amusing!" Elfie tried to match his easy tone, but she was shocked. It always disturbed her to hear Larry's careless references to his father's indiscretions. She feared she was old fashioned.

"You don't really think infidelity amusing, Elfie." Neville frowned at her levity.

"Why not?" Larry gave her no chance to answer. "You couldn't find anything much funnier than dad, with his waist line, going flapper, unless"—he paused with a faintly rueful laugh—"it's mother and her collection of tea hounds."

Elfie saw in Nev's face an unconscious reflection of her own inner distaste.

"You're a very indulgent son, Larry," he said wryly.

"Have to make allowances for flaming middle age, you know." Larry

shrugged and dismissed the subject. "Shall we blow?" he asked, and hooked his arm through Elfie's.

ELFIE had a curious feeling that she was saying good-by to something very sweet and never to be regained, as she kissed her mother and hugged Sally. Neville followed her and Larry out to the roadster and stood for a moment with his foot on the running board.

"Good-by, and good luck." His words were simple enough, but behind them was a whisper of pain.

"Why don't you drop around for one of the brawls?" Larry asked as he pressed his foot down on the starter.

"I may." Nev's eyes rested thoughtfully on Elfie.

"Good! We'll be expecting you." Larry threw out the clutch and the car leaped forward. "If he does come, it 'll sure be a surprise to yours truly," he said to Elfie.

His blue eyes smiled into hers. She snuggled against his shoulder and buried her nose in his tweedy, tobacco-scented coat.

"Sweet thing!" Larry's lips brushed a tendril of gold that escaped from beneath her little, felt hat. "Don't you like your lazy, good-for-nothing Larry?"

It was just sunset when they turned into a broad, graveled driveway.

"The ancestral estate . . . been in the family a whole year!" Larry laughed as he indicated the exquisite grounds. Elfie gave a little cry of mingled admiration and alarm at the sight of the pretentious Italian villa revealed by a bend in the drive. On a canopied terrace she caught glimpses of white-flanneled young men and gayly dressed girls lounging in porch chairs.

"The usual gang." Larry was cheerfully reassuring. "Hope they saved a cocktail for us."

With her heart doing a little staccato, Elfie let him help her from the roadster and lead her up the steps under a battery of idle eyes and careless "Howdy's." He headed for a slender woman with a faded rose leaf skin and henna-ed hair.

"'Lo, Fran, old dear, meet the girl friend." For Elfie's benefit, he added: "My maternal ancestor."

His mother! She looked more like an older sister. Elfie was speechless with surprise.

Francesca Waldron extended a languid hand. "So glad you could come to us, my dear." There was neither hostility nor warmth in her manner; rather indifference. She might have been welcoming any casual guest. "Larry must get you a cocktail and take you around to meet these people. I just can't leave Pietro. We're having a most interesting discussion." She turned back to a slim young man with patent leather hair and heavy-lidded eyes. "You must meet him. Miss—er?"

"Masters!" Elfie supplied her own name. Her violet eyes darkened with hurt. Surely Mrs. Waldron was being rude. It did not seem possible that she could have forgotten the name of the girl her son was to marry.

"Miss Masters, Count Pietro de Vadella," Francesca Waldron completed the introduction, and then with her sweet, disinterested smile, "I'm fearfully stupid about names."

"Where's dad?" Larry asked.

His mother arched her delicate, plucked eyebrows. "Really, darling, why ask me?" With a graceful, but definite gesture of dismissal she leaned once more toward the count.

Elfie felt very young and small girlish. Unconsciously she shrank closer to Larry, who had picked up the cocktail shaker and was holding it tentatively to his ear.

"Enough left for a couple of snorts," he said, and poured out two glasses of pale green liquid. "This will do for a starter."

Elfie took the glass he held out, hesitated, and then drained it. Instinctively she felt that a refusal would make her conspicuous. Her throat tingled with the cold, sharp taste.

"Come on, bootiful." Taking her hand, Larry moved over to a group of young people. "Meet the gang. Miss Masters . . . Elfie for short, and my future ball and chain . . . Ted, Bud, Mollie, Nadine . . ."

A GIRL with a shock of yellow hair, and slim, sun-tanned legs and arms disentangled herself from a stone bench on which she was curled.

"Larry forgets to mention that besides being Nadine, I'm his sister," she said, taking Elfie's hand in a boyish grip. There was frank curiosity in her bright eyes.

Elfie felt warmed by Nadine's welcome. Even her curiosity had a human quality lacking in her mother.

Nadine smiled as if satisfied with her inspection. "But I don't blame Larry for rhapsodizing. You know you're a sweet thing . . . quite an improvement over . . ."

"Oh, there's dad!" Larry interrupted with a flustered air that gave Elfie the impression that he had purposely stopped what his sister was about to say. "Hey, governor!" he hailed his father loudly. "Get an eyeful of the girl who'll soon be calling you daddie."

"Lots of them call me daddie," Mr. Waldron said as he shook hands with Elfie. He was a huge man, who looked oddly like a caricature of Larry. He had the same blue eyes, remnants of fair hair, and Larry's full, almost girlish mouth, now lost in folds of flesh. His plump, moist hands pressed hers caressingly. "A real little beauty," he added. "And—oh, here comes the fair Margot." He nodded in the direction of a smart blue coupé that had stopped in the drive. "She didn't lose much time in giving her rival the once-over," he added in a lower tone. "You can do the honors . . . and good luck!" He strolled off chuckling.

Elfie caught the aside and Larry's quick flush. A tiny gong within her seemed to sound a warning of danger as she watched a tall, graceful woman come leisurely up the steps. Her age might be anywhere from twenty-five to thirty, thought Elfie. There was a hothouse, ageless quality about this unknown Margot, with her smooth, dark hair, dead white skin, and startlingly scarlet mouth. A sleekly built man with ash blond hair followed her.

"Howdy, Margot! Good to see you again. And how's our boy Mort?" Larry went up to the newcomers with an almost overdone cordiality.

"'Lo, Larry darlin'." The woman spoke in a throaty voice. "It's good to see you after all these ages." The dark eyes that she lifted to his were wells of reproach.

"I — I've been busy." Elfie noted that Larry, for once in his confident young life, seemed at a loss.

"But, of course! Getting engaged or something, weren't you?" Margot's laugh somehow made engagements unimportant. "And this is the fiancée?" Her eyes traveled over Elfie.

"Yes." Larry recovered himself a trifle, but he still wore the look of a

badgered schoolboy. With a forced joviality he introduced the woman as "Mrs. Roland," and the man as "Mr. Cochran, who plays polo and manufactures something or other."

"And now for a little drink!" Larry concluded, as he took refuge behind the cocktail shaker.

"We've all been so curious to see Larry's latest." Margot Roland continued to survey Elfie with unveiled insolence. "Most romantic of him to find you waiting on table and carry you off."

"And most annoying to some of his friends, I presume." Elfie's voice was sweet, but little sparks of anger glowed in her violet eyes as she answered the challenge Margot had given.

"*Touché,* Margot!" Mort Cochran laughed.

Elfie looked at him squarely for the first time and had an impression of tawny eyes and a mouth that was thin and hard, yet curiously sensual.

"You're unbelievable," he said in a low, purring voice. "Beautiful and spirited as well. Like a good polo pony."

It was not altogether flattering to be compared to a horse, but she welcomed his admiration after Margot's vindictiveness. Larry, doing his daily dozen with the cocktail shaker, was apparently oblivious of the older woman's rudeness.

"Do you always class women and horses together?" Elfie asked, a little smile curving her rose petal lips.

"They're much alike, the thoroughbred—slim and silken and in need of a master's hand." With a light touch he led her away from the cocktail table as he spoke.

Unconsciously Elfie glanced down at the hand that rested on her arm. It was browned and sinewy, a hand that had mastered both horses and women. Something like dread touched her.

"How's everything?" Nadine came up with her swift, athletic stride and dropped a protecting arm around Elfie, who smiled her relief. "Thought Margot might be getting out her claws." Nadine lowered her voice to a whisper. "She's a cat."

"If you want to talk about me, I'll clear out." Mort Cochran smilingly misinterpreted the aside.

"Women don't always talk about you, Mort." Nadine made an impudent face at him.

"No?" mockingly.

Nadine burlesqued dismay. "He's off. Quick, Elfie, let's run. You're not safe. I'm going to take you up to your room to dress for dinner."

"But I'll see you at the club tonight?" Cochran stopped them. "And you'll give me a dance — several dances?" His long, hard fingers closed around Elfie's fragile wrist.

"You'll have to settle that with Larry."

"Settle what with me?" At the sound of his name, Larry looked up from his tête-à-tête with Margot Roland.

"Whether your delightful fiancée will dance with me or not."

"How quaint of her," Margot laughed maliciously. "You're the perfect old-fashioned girl, aren't you, Miss Masters? Or do you play the old army game?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to explain." Elfie could feel the hot color flush her cheeks, but she was determined not to let this venomous woman best her. "That's slang which came out before my time."

Nadine gave a whoop of glee and squeezed Elfie. "You're priceless, angel cake."

Margot's increased pallor showed the anger that shook her. "The army game describes a very stupid line—the 'Oh, you great, big, wonderful man' stuff," she said coldly.

Elfie hated herself, but she could not get used to these new ways

"You handed her a fast one." Nadine was still giggling as she and Elfie went into the house. "If there's one thing Margot Roland hates it's to be reminded that she's no longer as young as she used to was."

"I was rather nasty."

"She had it coming. She's a cat that's been deprived of its cream."

"You mean . . . Larry?"

"Larry gave her a schoolboy rush. Didn't he tell you?"

As Elfie shook her head, Nadine continued: "Stupid of him. He might have known you'd meet Margot, and she'd let you know if no one else did. You don't mind, do you?"

"I could hardly expect to be the first love in Larry's life, could I?" Elfie spoke lightly, but she was conscious of a little pain deep within her. It was one thing to imagine a girl in Larry's past, another to meet her in the flesh, a girl — or woman, rather — who was prepared to battle for him with claw and fang.

"That's the spirit." Nadine was satisfied by Elfie's pretended indifference. "Ta-ta, darling." She blew a kiss. "Dinner's going to be a family affair, but afterward we're blowing over to the club for dancing."

FRESH from the expert hands of Mathilde, Elfie surveyed herself in the mirror. In spite of everything, a delicious sense of well-being pervaded her. For the first time in her

life, Elfie knew what it was to have a maid prepare a scented bath, lay out her lingerie, dress the soft waves of her hair, and shape her nails to shining pinkness.

"You are *exquise,* mademoiselle." Mathilde looked at her handiwork with approval.

Elfie had selected the simplest of her evening dresses, a creamy satin, that molded the slender column of her body and broke into a series of fan-like ruffles below the knees. Above the low-cut bodice her slim shoulders and arms emerged moon-white. The only color accents were the deep violet of her eyes and the gold of her hair.

Larry, very handsome in his dinner clothes, met her in the library when she came downstairs.

"You're a gorgeous girl to-night."

There was a flush on his face and a slight unsteadiness in his step as he came up to her, but Elfie was too happy in his admiration, and too proud of him to be critical. She raised her provocative mouth and his lips found hers just as his mother strolled in, followed by the count.

"Ah, young love!" Count Vadella beamed fatuously.

"Sweet, but pale compared to the love of maturity, Pietro." Francesca Waldron spoke languidly, but there was a seductive flame in the glance she gave between heavily mascara-ed eyelashes.

The count took her pale, slim hand and kissed the palm lingeringly. Elfie looked away as from something immodest. She could not reconcile herself to philandering mothers.

"When do we eat? And where's Bill?" Nadine came in.

"At your service." A freckled, stocky young man appeared in the doorway.

"Elfie, this is a brother-to-be," Nadine presented him informally.

"But I didn't know . . ."

"Neither does Bill. But he's my heavy heavy—Bill Saybrook—and he's going to marry me. So that will make him your brother, won't it?"

"It won't, because I'm not." Bill interrupted her grimly.

"Must you spurn me in public?" Nadine's cheerfulness was undisturbed. "Bill has feelin's on the subject of the idle rich," she explained to Elfie. "He refuses my honorable proposals, but it's no use. You're marrying me in October, big boy . . . on my birthday. I want a present, and you're it."

"I'm not. I won't be any rich girl's lap dog. I'm a hard-working young advertising man . . ."

"And I'll be hard working young advertising man's wife."

The dinner bell sounded.

Elfie had seen such dinner tables in pictures, and read of them in books, but she had never before sat at one. Pale, yellow roses, in a crystal bowl, banked the center of the table. Candles in heavy silver holders illumined glasses of unbelievable thinness, the priceless lace of the cloth, and the exquisite Ming china.

Yet there was something missing, thought Elfie. There seemed to be no family communion at this glorious dinner table. Mrs. Waldron talked animatedly to her heavy-lidded count. Nadine and Bill kept up their half tender, half quarrelsome exchange, while Larry divided his attention between wine and Elfie herself.

DINNER was scarcely over before a noisy carload of young people descended upon them. Larry, with Elfie snuggled beside him, set a breakneck pace to the club in his cream-

colored roadster. The sob of saxophones echoed through the ballroom when they pulled up in the moonlit drive.

"Hot orchestra and a sweet baby. It's going to be a large evening, sweet." Larry led her out on the floor exuberantly.

Elfie rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. The throb of the jazz beat in her veins. For the first time she began to feel a part of the gay, mad whirl about her. And then the stag line discovered her. She was passed breathlessly from one pair of arms to another. Larry cut in, only to lose her again, but he grinned.

"You're a wow, sweet thing!"

Elfie sensed his pride, and she was glad of her success with his friends. A pale rose of excitement flushed her cheeks, and her eyes were twin stars of happiness. It was the most thrilling party of her life. She had forgotten about Margot Roland entirely, and it was like a dash of cold water to look up from the arms of a sun-tanned, captivated youth to find Margot's cold eyes upon her.

The older woman stood in the doorway with Mort Cochran at her elbow. In evening dress she was even more exotic and alluring than in afternoon clothes. Lusterless black crape fitted her tall, seductive body like a sheath and matched the darkness of her hair. Her mouth was a line of scarlet in her pale face.

Even as Elfie watched, she saw Margot raise her hand imperiously and motion to some one on the floor. Larry, of course! He came to her at once, his lips wreathed in the amiable, boyish smile, peculiarly his own.

"What's the matter? Have I developed halitosis or athlete's foot?" Elfie heard her partner's aggrieved voice. "You're frowning cruelly at me."

"So sorry, big boy." Elfie tried to banish her depression. Jealousy was out-moded in this care-free world.

"Cut in?" She gave a little start at the customary formula. The voice was Mort Cochran's. He must fairly have bolted across the floor.

"I wanted to come earlier," he said as his arms closed around her in the embrace of the dance, "but Margot likes late entrances—more effective, she thinks. I've been starving for another glimpse of you."

"Second meetings are so often a disappointment?" Elfie let her voice trail upward, inviting his flattery, while through the maze of the dancers she could see Margot very close to Larry, her dark eyes melting into his.

"Not in this case." Cochran's embrace tightened. "You're even more beautiful than I remembered you. Come outside where I can see the moonlight on that marvelous hair of yours, and I'll tell you just how lovely you are." He stopped dancing as he spoke.

Elfie looked up and realized that he had guided her deftly through the crowd, avoiding stags, until they stood at the French doors leading to the veranda. He leads me as easily as one of his polo ponies, she thought, and stiffened into rebellion.

"But I don't want to go outside," she said. "This orchestra is a honey, and I feel like dancing."

"Just as you please." There was amusement in his tawny eyes, and she had a feeling that he sensed her thoughts and was giving her her head as he would a pony.

"I'll have to save my sweet murmurings," he said, and paused meaningly, "until the drive home."

"The drive home? But Larry is..."

"Taking Margot home." He laughed. "She informed me on the way over that she wouldn't need my escort home. It's quite evident whom she has chosen for an escort. And Margot's a very determined woman," he added mockingly.

"We'll see." The luscious line of Elfie's lips straightened, and her soft chin elevated. Secretly she resolved not to yield her place in Larry's cream-colored roadster without a struggle. Two could play the same game, and Margot Roland had no monopoly on determination.

"A girl as beautiful as you should never battle for a man."

The hot color flooded Elfie's cheeks at Cochran's comment. His uncanny perceptiveness both infuriated and fascinated her.

"'Lo, little Red Riding Hood. Watch out for the big, bad wolf." The gay warning came from Nadine, who tangoed up with Bill.

"Such a demon chaperon you make, Nadine." Cochran's tone was exasperated.

"Elfie needs one when you're around. Besides, I'm getting the gang together. We're going to a chicken shack."

"Good enough." He leaned toward Elfie. "That gives me my chance to be alone with you that much sooner. Don't forget I'm waiting if you find Larry's car . . . crowded!"

"Thanks." Elfie concealed her mounting unease behind a bright smile as she hurried off after Nadine to the cloak room.

THE crowd were already piling into cars when the two girls came out on the veranda with their wraps. Bill at once carried Nadine off in his own disreputable roadster. He would have taken Elfie, too, but she spied Larry sauntering down the drive.

"Larry!" She called to him as she ran down the veranda steps.

He stopped at once and waited, but she saw with a prick of resentment that he was not alone. Margot's dark clad figure was briefly visible in the glare of passing headlights. Elfie hesitated, then pressed ahead.

"Did I keep you waiting?" she asked.

Margot spoke before Larry could answer, and her voice was liquid ice. "But we weren't waiting. On these parties everybody just barges along with the person they happen to be dancing with last. Mort is driving you, isn't he?"

"Not that I know of." Elfie tried to match the older woman's assurance. Inside she was trembling. Her violet eyes sought Larry, appealing to him for support, but he avoided her gaze. He looked as uncomfortable as only a man can look who finds himself between two hostile women.

Undignified as now the battle appeared, Elfie had to see it through. There was a pathetic courage about her small figure as she faced Margot and continued with forced sweetness.

"I'm sure Mr. Cochran's expecting you, but if you prefer to drive with Larry and me, we'll both be delighted, won't we, dear?"

Larry mumbled something and bolted for the roadster.

Margot's high, insulting laughter rippled forth as she turned. "Larry, darlin', you haven't got a fiancée," she called back over her shoulder loudly enough for the near-by cars to hear, "she's a wet nurse!"

"That was dumb. You made me

look like an awful egg." Larry's boyish face was sulky as he opened the door of the car to Elfie.

"Would you rather have her with you?" Elfie's voice was low. Quick tears had flooded her eyes.

"Of course not." Larry threw the car into high with a jerk. "But it was silly to make such a fuss. It just isn't done. Being engaged is almost like being married nowadays. If you stick around together all the time everybody thinks you're goofy."

"I'm sorry I acted like a goof," Elfie said quietly. She blinked back her tears and stared ahead at the silver ribbon of road over which they were racing. She felt like a child that has been unjustly spanked. A wave of homesickness came over her. She wanted her mother and Sally and . . . Nev. It would be a comfort to talk to Nev. He'd understand. Nev had ideals about love. He'd want his own girl, not some black-haired vamp in his car, if he were engaged, and if he had a car, Elfie thought somewhat incoherently.

"Elfie!" Larry broke the chill silence after a time. His voice was cheerful again. "Let's kiss and make up."

She drew away a trifle. "Not just yet," she said. The hurt he had administered was too recent.

He whistled softly, and pressed his foot down on the accelerator. Elfie stole a glance at him and saw that his expression was one of injured innocence and bewilderment. What a boy he was! She wanted to laugh and to cry at the same moment. Her lovely face softened.

"Elfie's mad and I am glad
And I know what will please her . . ."

Larry turned to her once more with the ridiculous little rime as he threw on the brakes in front of a road house shack from which came the smell of frying chicken. Irrepressible Larry. Elfie gave a choked laugh and did not resist this time when he drew her to him. The touch of his young mouth on hers was sweet and took the sting from her heartache.

It was not until she was in her own room, tucked in between cool linen sheets that she let her thoughts return to the recent unpleasantness.

"But I won't be a goof again." Elfie made this decision aloud as she stared into the darkness. There would be other parties, she thought—parties where she'd not only permit, but insist that Larry take Margot home. And she herself would make a play for Mort Cochran. She wondered if Larry would be jealous. She hoped so. But only simple, old-fashioned people wanted their own sweethearts. Neville Brant was old fashioned, very old fashioned. Swords and roses. Elfie's mind was hazy with sleep. She had a mental flash of him in the garb of a bygone age . . . knee breeches and lace at his cuffs, a dueling sword in hand. Men used to be jealous—jealous enough to die for their sweethearts. It would have been fun to live in the age of romance, she thought, just as her white eyelids closed.

ELFIE awoke early the next morning to find her room flooded with sunshine. She jumped out of bed, exhilarated by the sheer glory of the day whose brightness seemed to dispel any lurking gloom. A swim, tennis, a polo match were ahead. Nadine had mentioned these as part of the day's program. Tingling from a cold shower, Elfie slipped into a backless white shantung tennis dress, thrust slim, stockingless feet into plaited leather

pumps, and pulled a white béret over her damp gold ringlets.

A maid conducted her to a gayly decorated breakfast room, where breakfast was served from a buffet laden with silver covered dishes and bowls of fruit arranged on cracked ice. Bill Saybrook was the sole occupant. He looked up morosely at Elfie's entrance.

"Guess you and I are the only ones alive this morning."

"Too bad when it's such a glorious morning," Elfie laughed, and strolled over to the buffet.

"No one ever sees the morning sun in this house. Believe me, when I marry Nadine I'm going to take her away from this kind of stuff. They stay up all night, drinking and flirting with the other fellow's girl or somebody else's husband, then sleep all day. It's a rotten life."

Elfie selected a dish of fresh raspberries and a tiny casserole of shirred eggs and kidney and smiled. She couldn't quite agree with his denunciation. Not when the sun was so bright and the coffee smelled so deliciously.

"I believe you're one of those men who have morning grouches."

Bill grinned. "Maybe I am, or perhaps I'm just mad because I've got to beat it into Chicago and grub over a desk all day." He gulped his coffee and hurried out.

Elfie finished a leisured breakfast and strolled into the grounds. She wished that Larry were with her to share the sunshine and her joy of living. A gardener directed her to the rose garden, a bloom with roses of rare and beautiful shades. Like a white butterfly, Elfie fluttered from bush to bush, reveling in an ecstasy of beauty and fragrance.

"Pick yourself a bunch, missie." The gardener was pleased by her appreciation and gave her a pair of scissors.

Gratefully Elfie clipped a bouquet of creamy tea roses whose pale pink matched the flush of her cheeks.

When Larry found her some time later, he smothered her, roses and all, in one of his bear hugs. "Sweet thing!" And then, before Elfie could catch her breath, he had her by the arm racing her across the velvet grass. "Going to play some tennis," he said.

Nadine and a sun-browned youth in white flannels, with whom Elfie had danced the night before, awaited them by the courts. Nadine waved a yellow telegram as they came up.

"Can you feature it?" She handed the message to Larry. "Nev's wiring that he'll drop in on us to-night. The end of the world has come. What's up?"

Larry shook his head. "Maybe he's tired of all work and no play. If it were any one but Nev, I'd say he was following Elfie, but Nev has no use for women."

"That's not quite true." Nadine spoke up quickly. "Nev's waiting for his ideal girl. He doesn't believe in frittering love away on every passing flame."

"Kind of saving himself for the big game," Larry chuckled.

Elfie's lovely face had grown thoughtful. She wondered what Nev's ideal girl was like, and if he would ever find her. Was it possible that she herself might have been the girl for whom he had been storing up all the love of his young manhood?

THE day passed in a whirlwind of amusement. There was a swift set of doubles at tennis, then a swim at the beach which adjoined the

Waldron estate. But all through the day it was Mort who was constantly at her side, while Larry was everywhere.

It seemed strange that Mort Cochran should want her company so much, while Larry, her husband-to-be, shelved her carelessly. Elfie stood in her own room for a moment before leaving for the club that night, and marveled at the change that had come to Larry. Before their engagement he had been a model of devotion. Was it the atmosphere of infidelity and cynicism all about them that made him afraid to show his love? Or was he one of those men interested only in the pursuit? Had her beauty dulled with conquest?

A veil of wistfulness clouded Elfie's eyes, and with a breath of a sigh on her lips, she wrapped herself in her cream velvet evening cape. She dreaded the inevitable encounter with Margot and the consequences of her half promises during the day to Cochran.

She thought of Neville Brant, quiet, strong and steady, and was conscious of a little ache of disappointment when she remembered that the last train from the south had arrived without bringing him.

There was no Nev. No one but herself to depend on. Elfie straightened her slim shoulders with the courage that was part of her and went downstairs.

Mort Cochran and Margot joined the Waldron party immediately upon their arrival at the club. Elfie saw Margot attach Larry, and was surprised to find herself less hurt than exasperated at his charming amiability which made him such an easy victim.

"Well, let him go," she thought, with a mental shrug, and turned to Mort Cochran.

"Little violet lady," Cochran murmured, and pressed her slim fingers admiringly. She was, indeed, a violet girl in a chiffon dancing dress that shaded from pale orchid to deep heliotrope. Its gorgeous coloring was reflected in her eyes, making them more than ever like amethyst stars . . . rather cold stars, though. She had resigned herself to playing the game. She played it gayly, with quick smiles, and frequent if not quite true laughter.

"Well, where do we go from here?" With a reckless coquetry she sought out Mort when the party began to break up. No scenes to-night, she decided. Larry could go his way.

"You'd be surprised." Mort's lips twisted into a satisfied smile as he led her out to his big scarlet touring car.

"Hey, Elfie!" Nadine called to her from the front seat of Bill's old car. "We're going straight home. Nev's there. He just telephoned. He flew up in a seaplane."

"Dear Neville!" The exclamation was in Margot Roland's silken voice. She paused on her way to Larry's roadster. "He's such a romantic darling. Just like a prince of old he comes riding . . ."

"Princes of old rode horses," Nadine said in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Seaplanes are still more thrilling," Margot laughed, and moved away in answer to Larry's impatient, thick-voiced, "Come, sugar, let's get going."

Elfie's lovely face was a mixture of puzzlement and annoyance. It was queer to hear Margot call Nev a prince. Larry had always seemed the prince. She wondered how Margot knew Nev so well, and asked Mort Cochran.

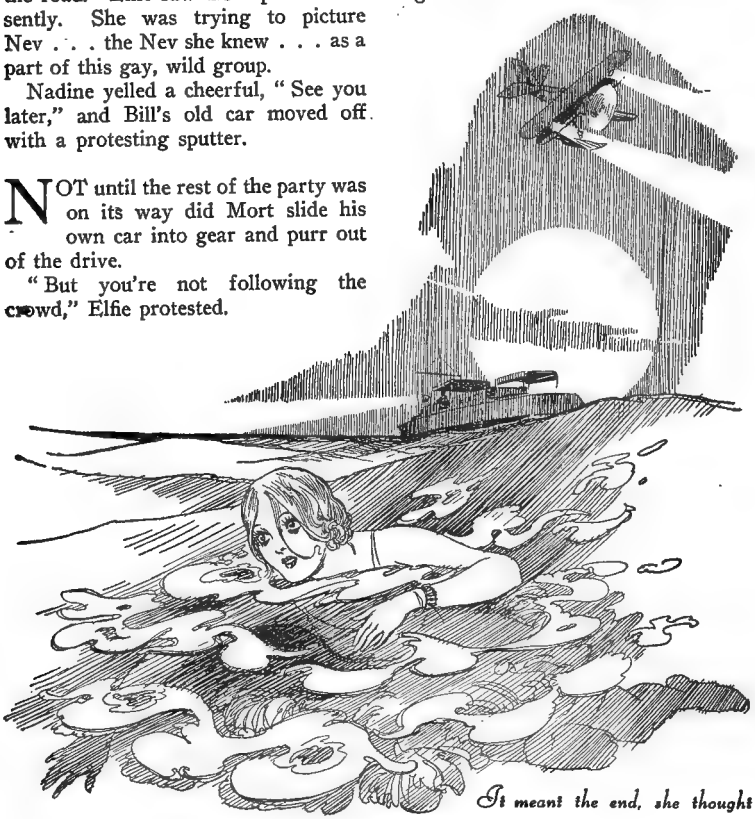
"Oh, he used to play around with this gang," Mort said carelessly, while he fussed with the instrument on the dashboard.

Larry's roadster tore down the drive, just missing one of the cement posts as he swung on two wheels into the road. Elfie saw his departure absently. She was trying to picture Nev . . . the Nev she knew . . . as a part of this gay, wild group.

Nadine yelled a cheerful, "See you later," and Bill's old car moved off with a protesting sputter.

NOT until the rest of the party was on its way did Mort slide his own car into gear and purr out of the drive.

"But you're not following the crowd," Elfie protested.



It meant the end, she thought

"Do I look like a man who follows the crowd?" amusedly.

"But I must get home. Nadine said Nev was there."

"What's the diff?" Mort asked.

Elfie had no answer. She could not explain to him her need to see Nev and feel his warm, sweet smile. To Mort he was merely Larry's cousin. She was silent, her eyes on the speedometer. Fifty—sixty—seventy!

Alarm stirred within her. "I want to go home."

He said nothing, just increased the speed to seventy-five. "I'm going to carry you off and teach you love—a man's love!"

There was something in his voice—something Elfie had never heard before in a man's voice. The chill of fear gripped her.

It was only by a tremendous effort

that she kept her voice steady as she asked lightly, "Is kidnaping your regular method of mastering women?"

"Only in rare cases." He slowed down and put his arm around her. "Most women aren't worth kidnaping. But you—" His burning eyes devoured the loveliness of her heart-shaped face. "You're worth any effort. I'm mad for you, Elfie."

The car slid to a stop.

"You're the most exquisite thing I've ever seen." She could feel the passion throbbing in his words. "Your face is a moon flower. Your eyes are violets. Your lips—" He leaned closer, his mouth seeking hers.

Elfie fended him off. "But I'm Larry's. I belong—"

"To a boy who's so young, so stupid that he can't appreciate you. In his callowness and vanity he leaves you to follow any or every woman that beckons. What does he matter?"

"He's my future husband."

"And I'm your lover, Elfie." His arms tightened until it seemed that they would crush the very life from her slender body. His heart was pounding against hers. "I'm a man who knows how to love, how to appreciate the miracle of your beauty. And I want you!"

"No—no, Mort!" Elfie's cry was choked by the suffocating pressure of his moist, hungry mouth. His savage desire engulfed her with its pulsing fury.

"That's the way a man kisses—the way a man loves." He released her at length.

"I hate you," Elfie sobbed hysterically.

"But you'll learn to love me—to ask for my kisses."

"Never! You're a brute." She sat up and faced him angrily. "Haven't you any sense of honor and decency? You'd do this to a girl who's engaged to your friend?"

"My dear, what a child you are. Those days are gone forever when it was hands off a friend's woman. Now it's every man for himself."

"But you must have some code."

"Take your fun where you find it, that's my motto." There was a devil-may-care gleam in his tawny eyes.

"And what about me? Suppose fun for you is torture for me?"

"It won't be. You'll come to love me even as other women."

Was there no way to reach him? She took a last desperate chance. "I might," she said slowly. "But can't you give me a little time. I met you only yesterday, and I've never known a man like you before. I—I'm afraid." Her voice broke pitifully.

He seemed to debate with himself. The silence had grown almost unbearable before he spoke.

"I'll take you home this time." Elfie turned faint with relief as she heard his decision. "I'd rather have you come to me willingly. Besides—" His tone was rueful. "I hate to admit it, but you did get under my skin with your talk of honor among friends."

In silence he threw on the ignition and turned the big car around. Elfie was afraid to speak or move lest he change his mind.

"It's all right." Mort sensed her tension. "I said I'd take you home, and keeping my word happens to be a part of the code you asked about."

"I believe you." She relaxed, and a ghost of a smile touched her mouth.

He did not offer to touch her again until they stopped on the drive in front of the Waldron villa. Then coaxingly he put one hand under her soft chin and raised her face to his.

"Don't you think I deserve a reward?"

Elfie closed her eyes as his face came nearer. Partly gratitude, partly the sheer magnetism of the man left her strangely passive, as she felt once again his breath-taking kiss.

THE sound of a door opening on the terrace startled them from the embrace. Elfie glanced up. Her face crimsoned, then whitened. Two men stood on the terrace—Larry and Nev! Nev must have seen that kiss, she realized—he and Larry. Both were coming down the steps. Nev, with quick, firm steps. Larry, waveringly, drunkenly. Elfie waited with her heart pounding out a tattoo.

"Trying to beat my time, old boy?" Larry spoke thickly to Mort, while Nev stood—just stood and looked at Elfie.

Mort laughed, as if reassured by Larry's tone. "Little girls as well as little boys must play. If you turn 'em over to me—"

"Thass right—thass right!" Larry took the cue and laughed also. "Sweet thing, isn't she? Like to kiss her myself."

Elfie's lips parted. She had been braced for accusations, a quarrel, even a fight. And Larry laughed. He didn't care if a man like Mort Cochran kissed her. Her own laughter, hard and hysterical, rang out.

"You'd better come in, Elfie." Suddenly Nev had taken charge of the situation. "And you, Larry; get to bed. You're drunk." There was infinite scorn in his tone. He had opened the door of Mort's car and motioned Elfie to the ground. She noticed that he didn't offer to touch her. All the righteous anger that should have been Larry's was registered in his face.

Elfie waited until a sleepy footman had helped Larry upstairs.

"Nev, I'd like to explain," she began.

Nev stopped her coldly. "Please, Elfie, you needn't explain to me. I have no claim on you, and Larry doesn't object. I thought you were different, but I see I was mistaken." He spoke harshly. "You've adopted the customs of the pack, and seem to like it. My opinion is unimportant."

"But it isn't. I—"

"You'd better go to bed."

He might just as well have said "Get out of my sight!" so complete was the scorn in his dark eyes.

Elfie shrank back, her slim hand fluttering to her throat. She couldn't speak for the tide of emotion that swept her. With his scorn had come the knowledge of how much he meant to her. Why, his good opinion was the most important thing in all the world! It wasn't Larry, it was Nev who mattered. She loved him! In a split second the blinding scales of infatuation dropped from her eyes.

"Good night." He swung on his heel.

"Nev!" She uttered his name in a whisper, but if he heard he made no sign.

Stunned, Elfie moved up the stairs to her room. She still could not quite understand what had happened to her. She marveled at her own folly. It had been Nev all along; Nev who was so strong, so gentle. The gayety of Larry had called to the gay, wild youth in her, but she had never loved him. She had liked his laughter and his boyishness. She had been enthralled by his charm and glamour; but he had touched nothing deep within her.

Morning found Elfie rather white and subdued. During the long hours

of the night she had considered her problem. Of only one thing was she sure: she must tell Larry that their engagement was a mistake. Knowing that she no longer loved him, despising him a trifle for his adorable childishness and weakness, she could not marry him. He would not be too hurt, she knew.

Nadine noticed Elfie's depression at the breakfast table.

"The night life getting you?" she queried.

"A little. Where's Larry?"

"Sleeping it off. He won't be down until afternoon. Awfully plastered last night, wasn't he?"

Elfie nodded absently. "And Nev?" She found it strangely hard now to speak his name. It seemed as if there must be cadences of tenderness in her voice that would reveal her secret.

Nadine buttered a slice of toast before answering. "He flew to Chicago on business this morning, but he'll be back to-night."

Elfie's heart began to do things at this news. A new hope awakened. Nev was coming back. Before he returned she would straighten out her entanglement with Larry and be free. She'd explain then about last night. Nev would have to listen. She'd make him.

THE day passed slowly. Elfie prowled about the house for hours waiting for Larry to appear, but it was well into the afternoon before he came downstairs. His face looked pasty and his blue eyes bloodshot.

"Larry, I want to talk to you about something serious," Elfie, after a murmur of sympathy, made the plunge. She was too unstrung for finesse.

"Darling, not at a time like this!" Larry answered as he burlesqued horror. "I'm in no condition for the serious things of life."

It was like that all day. Larry either refused to listen or people and circumstances prevented. Elfie dressed for dinner with the situation still unclarified. There was a desperate look in her violet eyes. She had hoped so to be free for Nev when he came back.

Very pale and lovely, in sheer black tulle that lent an opalescent whiteness to her delicate skin, she went downstairs early, and sent a servant to Larry's room, requesting him to join her on the terrace.

He came after a time, with the air of a small boy about to be chastised. "Gosh, you're a one-ideaed woman, Elfie. What's this you've got on your mind?" he said petulantly.

"Our engagement, Larry." His irritability made it easier. "I wanted to tell you that it's a mistake."

"You're still grousing about Margot?" He ground his lighted cigarette under his heel. "You ought to know there's nothing to that. Besides, who are you to kick? I was pretty tight last night, but not too tight to see the hot necking party you were throwing with Mort Cochran."

"I know, Larry," she said gently, not trying to excuse herself. "But I don't like that sort of thing. I don't want the kind of a life or a husband who'll force me into it. We're different, you see."

She thought it best to tell him nothing of that other love which was in her heart. It would only wound his vanity and arouse his masculine instinct for conquest.

"Maybe we are," Larry agreed moodily. "Marriage isn't going to make a monk out of me, and I don't expect you to take the veil. If you're

going to crab, though, everything will be blah."

"Very blah. So I think we'd better call it quits." She drew the square-cut diamond from her finger. It gleamed blue-white in her pink, extended palm.

"You're the most beautiful girl I've ever known." He hesitated.

"But there are so many beautiful girls."

"Right-o!" He laughed a shade bitterly and took the diamond from her.

"Why all the gloom?" Nadine's gay query came from the open French windows.

Elfie's heart did a somersault, for over Nadine's shoulder she caught a glimpse of waving dark hair, and Neville's thin, clean-cut face.

"Elfie's giving me the air," Larry said bluntly. "Doesn't like me and my ways any more."

"And I'd just persuaded Bill that we'd make it a double wedding," Nadine cried in dismay, and came out to put her arm around Elfie. "But you don't mean it, really, do you? You know I was all set to have you for a sister."

"I'm sorry. I'd like to be your sister, but I—I just can't."

"Nonsense!" Nev's troubled voice broke in. "It's just a lover's quarrel."

"We haven't been quarreling." Elfie looked at him for a long moment and wondered what he'd say if he knew the true reason for the broken engagement.

The dinner bell put an end to the discussion. Elfie sat through the elaborate meal feeling curiously baffled. Nothing was changed. Larry was as attentive as usual, and grew recklessly gay over coffee and brandy. Neither his father nor mother seemed to notice the missing diamond. Nev, at the far end of the table, ate in silence, and glanced from Larry to Elfie worriedly. He drew Nadine aside as they left the dining room and talked to her in a whisper. With the quick perception of love, Elfie realized that he was leaving.

"Where's Nev gone?" she questioned Nadine as soon as she could.

"He's taking my roadster and is going to pick up Margot Roland and bring her back to the brawl." Nadine looked surprised at the note of panic in Elfie's voice. "Everything's going to be fine," she added reassuringly.

"Fine!" Elfie repeated the word blankly. It was the added straw that Nev—Nev, of all people, should go to Margot. "But why?"

"Oh, Nev and Margot are old friends. She tried out her fishing net on him even before she started after Larry. I think she was rather that way about him—although, of course, there was his money."

"Money!" Elfie felt like a parrot, but she was numbed with surprise. "I didn't know—"

Nadine laughed. "You wouldn't. Nev for the last year has been trying to forget his stocks and bonds. He was awfully interested in aviation, and wanted to learn it from the paid pilot's and mechanic's viewpoint."

ELFIE felt a lump of lead in the place where her heart should have been. Nadine's revelation had changed everything. If Nev had been poor, as she thought him, it might have been possible to confess her tardily discovered love. But now! He thought she'd quarreled with Larry. It would look as if she were another Margot, grasping for the next best bet financially. She turned away to hide from Nadine her tears.

Elfie never forgot the dance that night.

There was Margot. Elfie had never seen anything more lovely or sensuous than she, in a green chartreuse evening gown that clung to her rounded figure. She was concentrating all her charms on Neville Brant, apparently oblivious of Larry. It was plain that Neville's tardy attentions had lifted her to a seventh heaven.

Neville did not seem to mind, Elfie noticed with a wild throb of jealousy. He held Margot tightly while they danced and smiled down into her dark, inviting eyes. Elfie's pointed nails cut half-moons in her soft palms as she watched. The hurt she had felt when it was Larry that Margot was vamping was a pin prick compared to this awful, consuming pain.

"Aren't you going to dance with me?" Elfie asked him wistfully as they met once on the floor.

"Surely." Nev's smile was polite, but he made no effort to seek her out.

Then intermission came. It found Elfie with Mort Cochran.

"And now I've got you to myself," he said triumphantly as the orchestra rose and left for refreshments. "The boy friend's passed out, so you can hardly turn me down."

Elfie scarcely heard him. Her eyes were following Nev — Nev and Margot. With the rest of the party they were on their way outdoors. Elfie choked back a sob as she saw Nev help Margot into Nadine's roadster. Mort's hand was on her own elbow, leading her toward his car.

"Might as well get a breath of air," he said carelessly.

"All right," Elfie agreed, in a listless tone. She could think of nothing but Nev's apparent infatuation for Margot. It was possible, though, that he was trying to keep her from Larry. Nadine may have suggested such a course to him.

Elfie caught at the thought as at a straw of hope, but then she remembered Margot's beauty and her experience with men. An affair, even though begun as a game, could easily turn serious with a woman like that.

"Such a quiet little mouse." Mort was studying her with half closed eyes. "Got a peeve because the fiancé pulled a shut-eye at your engagement party?"

"It isn't an engagement party. That's all off," Elfie said wearily.

"You mean it?" Mort seemed electrified.

"Why, yes." Elfie was startled by his tone.

"Well, that's the way things happen." Mort spoke quietly again, and she was reassured. "Any special place you want to go?" he asked after a time.

"We'll have to be back soon."

"Oh, the gang will be out an hour, and I was thinking you might like to take a look at my new motor boat. It's anchored down by the club."

The suggestion was made politely, almost indifferently. Elfie hesitated, and thought of Nev driving through the night with Margot beside him. He needn't have taken her out for intermission if his interest were only in protecting Larry. Nadine had shunted Larry off for a needed sleep long before intermission.

"Sounds like fun," Elfie smiled, with a reckless light in her violet eyes.

Mort's boat was a lovely thing, trim, smart, and obviously built for speed.

"Climb in and take a look at the cabin." Mort helped her over the side and pointed out the luxurious little cabin in the stern. "And listen to this engine! Doesn't she purr like a kit-

ten?" He seated himself behind the steering wheel and gave the starting handle a turn. Then casually, "Let's take a little run."

THE small, powerful cruiser sped out into the dark waters of Lake Michigan. Elfie lay back in a low wicker deck chair and felt the cool spray against her face. Overhead the sky was a mass of dark-piled clouds through which the moon peeped at capricious intervals. The stormy beauty of the night and the quiet eased the ache in her heart. Time itself seemed to stand still.

"You're beautiful—too beautiful!" Mort's voice broke the spell that held her. His eyes devoured the dreamy loveliness of her face, the glory of her hair which the wind had whipped into tendrils of spun gold. The old, insistent note of passion was back again.

Elfie stirred and looked around her uneasily. Far, far in the distance she could see the shore line with its lights twinkling like dim stars.

"Don't you think we'd better go back? Every one will wonder—"

"Let them wonder." Mort reached down and snapped off the ignition. The purr of the engine ceased. "Do you really think I'm going to take you back—yet?"

Elfie sat up, and a nervous laugh broke from her dry lips. "These kidnapings are becoming a habit with you," she said, trying to hide her fear, although the strange, hot light in his eyes sent a quiver of dread through her.

"You've become a habit—a necessity, in fact." Mort leaned toward her and his hands caught hers in a grip that bruised. "Don't you know that I must have you, Elfie?"

"Take me back right away!"

Mort laughed as if pleased by her terror. "Not this time. Last night I was fool enough to let you go, but to-night there's no Larry in the background. You yourself told me the engagement was off. And you're mine, Elfie, mine!"

"But you can't do this!" Yet she knew that he could and would. There was a ruthless determination about him that turned her blood to ice.

"Who's to stop me? There's just you and I—here in the middle of Lake Michigan. And I want you!"

Elfie shuddered and stared at him in helpless silence. Her eyes turned desperately to the lake, but there was no other boat in sight at that hour of the night.

"Nobody to interfere." Mort interpreted her glance and waved his hand at the dark expanse of water. "So why not make the best of it?"

Elfie sprang to her feet, shaking off his fingers. "Never!"

"You'll fall overboard if you aren't quiet," he said, in the tone he might use toward a fractious horse. The boat rocked perilously. "You could never make it." He pointed to the distant shore line. "And drowning's a fearfully unpleasant end." There was a mocking light in his tawny eyes.

"I'd rather drown than stay here with you," hotly.

"Come now, my dear, this 'give me honor or give me death' stuff is out. Girls don't act like that except in books." He laughed again, and something in that cynical mirth was like the flick of a whip to Elfie's spirit.

"No?" She threw back her head and her own laughter, wild and proud, cut across the night. Before he could comprehend what had happened her slim body flashed over the bow in a clean, straight dive. She heard Mort's star-

tled cry just as the dark waters of the lake closed over her.

She kicked off her dancing pumps and swam under water as far as she could, fearing that he would find and drag her back. When she did come up for breath she saw that the motor boat was in motion, with its searchlight playing on the lake. A cloud had obscured the moon, she noticed thankfully. It would not be easy to find her small, bobbing head.

Mort had turned the cruiser toward the shore, evidently expecting her to take that direction. Elfie drew a long breath, and then, with her smooth, steady crawl stroke, headed toward the middle of the lake. It was the only way to escape discovery. It meant the end, she thought, but after all, it didn't matter much which way she swam. She could never make it to shore anyhow.

On and on she swam, easily, steadily. People said a drowning person remembered his whole life. She couldn't remember much except the way Nev's dark hair waved back from his forehead and the curve of his lips. She wished that she could have kissed that tender, firmly modeled mouth just once. The hum of the motor boat was growing fainter. Mort would never find her now.

A QUEER, droning sound reached her ears. It wasn't Mort's engine. She treaded water and looked around. There was no other boat in sight. Then she realized that the sound came from overhead. In the same moment she was bathed in a flood of light.

A seaplane, playing a searchlight on the water! Rescue? She hardly dared to believe her own eyes and ears. Her white arms went upward in wild appeal.

Then the droning became a roar. There was a splash. She saw the plane's pontoons strike the water scarcely twenty-five feet from her just as a jet of surf and a great wave engulfed her. She came up sputtering and choked. Her breath was gone. She tried to scream at the dark figure that was crawling out on one of the wings of the plane. She couldn't swim any farther. She was too tired—too tired. The waters seemed to pull her under, just as a dark body hurtled through the air.

Two strong arms closed around her. She was being carried through the water, dragged upward. She opened her tired eyes and saw that she had been hauled up on a wing of the plane.

"Elfie, Elfie, darling!" Nev's voice whispered her name. She wasn't surprised. She had known it was he the moment he touched her. There could be no one else with arms as strong and gentle as Nev. She closed her eyes again, strangely happy. She was against his breast as he carried her into the cockpit of the plane.

"Darling, darling, darling! Look at me!" He kept saying it over and over, while he chafed her hands.

Elfie's eyelids fluttered upward and she tried to smile.

"You're all right?" There was a sob in his voice. She felt something warm and salt on her face.

Why, he was crying! And he had called her darling! He must care. Strength flowed back into Elfie's tired body. She raised her slim arms and they found his neck. They drew his head down — closer — closer—closer. She'd wanted to kiss him so much. She had known his lips would feel like this, warm and tender, yet ardent with a strong man's ardor.

"Elfie, you kissed me as if you loved

me?" He held her off and looked at her with wonderment in his dark eyes.

"But I do love you." Then seeing the doubt that still bound him: "It was never Larry. I was a silly, romantic girl, and he seemed like a Prince Charming—and he rushed me so hard."

"I know." Nev nodded grimly. "I told him in the beginning that you were my dream girl, and like the spoiled boy that he is, he set out to take you from me."

"But it was always you, way down deep, Nev." Somehow she had to make him believe.

"And Mort Cochran — where does he fit in with that picture?" Nev's voice had grown stern, as if he had just remembered things better forgotten. "Why did you go with him tonight?"

"Because, because—" Elfie's face was shamed and penitent. "Because you were acting as if you'd fallen for Margot Roland. I—I think I must have gone a little insane. I was so jealous, Nev!"

"Margot!" There was genuine surprise in the exclamation. "I can't stand the woman. I was only trying to keep her away from Larry, so you two would have a chance to make up."

"And you were looking for me?"

"Yes, I'd seen Cochran's car parked down by the Beach Club, and I guessed that you'd gone out on the lake. I was worried. You're so little and sweet, and he—well—" He broke off as Elfie shivered.

"You found me!" Elfie finished the story for him. Then in a little, breathless whisper. "Aren't you glad? Don't you want me, Nev?"

"Want you?" Suddenly she was crushed to his heart. "Want you?" There was a world of longing in his voice. Elfie looked up into his dark eyes.

And she closed her own against the blinding glory of love.

Love Song

MY heart is a lute
Of infinite strings,
Broken and silenced
By sorrowful things.
But, Love, I have found you,
And my heart, so long mute,
Now trembles with gladness—
My heart is a lute.

—Edgar Daniel Kramer

Mind Says, Heart Says

MIND says, "Let him go.
I'll teach you wiser things."
Heart says, "You'll never know
Aught sweeter than love brings."

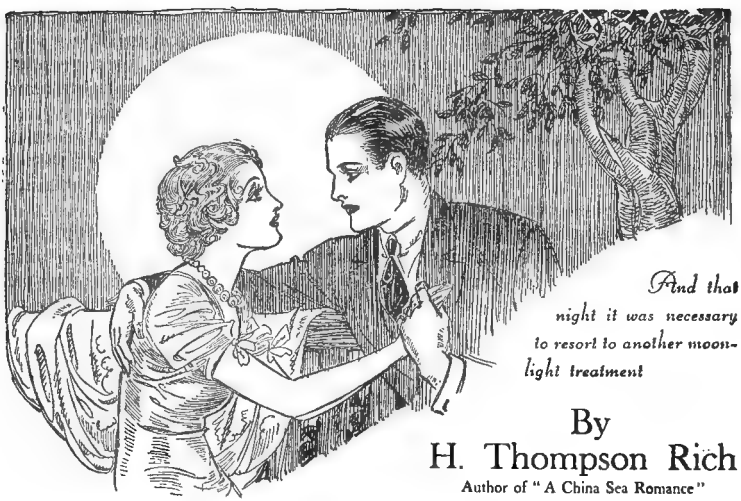
Mind says, "Beware, beware,
Love is bitter drinking."
Heart says, "Love is the stair
One climbs to Heaven, I'm thinking."

Mind says, "You're growing old.
Why waste a single minute?"
Heart says, "One hour can hold
The whole of life within it."

Heart says so much that's true;
Mind, so much that's wise—
How to choose between the two?
The answer is in your eyes.

—Elizabeth Montefiori

Vacation Blues



And that night it was necessary to resort to another moonlight treatment

By H. Thompson Rich

Author of "A China Sea Romance"

Who wouldn't have done what Sally did? To work a whole year for one precious week of freedom and then—

AS Sally Davis descended from the train to the sunny, wind swept platform of Manhattan Transfer, that Sunday afternoon in early September, a feeling of resentment swept over her. For a solid week it had done nothing but rain, yet now that her vacation was over, the skies were blue as April.

Why couldn't there have been some of this gorgeous weather last week, when she was trying to enjoy herself at Lake Forest? But no, it had rained, rained, rained. With the result that she'd had a perfectly rotten time.

And now she'd have to go back to the office and work another whole year for one precious week of freedom—unless she yielded to the matrimonial persuasions of her boss, Martin Hunt.

For months now she'd been holding him off, anything but thrilled by this baldish, unromantic little bachelor whose dictation and avowals she was obliged to take by turns, for her thirty dollars a week.

Lots of girls would have been quite glad to be Martin Hunt's wife, she supposed, knowing that it would mean a nice home somewhere, and everything that went with it. But not so Sally.

She could forgive him his baldishness. She could forgive him his lack of romance. What she couldn't forgive him, however, was the fact that he was forty, while she was only twenty. Which meant that when *she* was forty, Martin would be eighty—or no, sixty.

Even that was bad enough. But much worse to be forty! Sally never wanted to be forty. At least, she didn't want to think about it. Particularly, she didn't want to think about being Mrs. Hunt at forty.

Nor did she have to, just then—for suddenly, as she was standing amid the throng of going and returning vacationists, waiting for the Jersey City tube train, a tall young man with a large bag came swinging up.

Right in front of her he paused, and plumped his bag down beside her own, plumped it down so close, in fact, that one solid corner landed squarely on her smartly shod small foot.

SALLY looked up with a grimace of pain.

"Ouch!" she said.

"Sorry!" said the young man, removing his property hastily to a less offending location. "Clumsy of me."

"Very!" agreed Sally, regarding ruefully what but a moment before had been a faultless specimen of French shoe craft. "I don't think it hurt your bag any, though!" she added, with a rather forced smile.

"No, I think we can concede that. I'm afraid, however, that your pump, or whatever you call it, didn't fare so well," noticing the deep scar his bag had scuffed in its delicate navy kid. "But I'll buy you another, if you'll let me."

"One wouldn't do any good, I fear!" with a flash of her hazel eyes and another smile, not so forced now.

"Then I'll buy you two!"

His own eyes were blue, she saw, and his face was clean-cut, attractive looking, though rather pale.

"That will be so kind, but some other time!" said Sally. "I'd hate to delay your vacation. I think you need it!"

"I think yours won't do you any harm, either!" said the young man, looking into her own somewhat pale face. "That's where you're going, I suppose?"

"Y-yes, that's where I'm going."

"So perhaps it 'll be better to wait till we get back, after all, before I replace that pair of shoes. By the way, where are you going?"

A moment's hesitation, then:

"Lake Forest."

"You don't say?" brightening. "Well, that's luck! So am I."

"O-oh!" said Sally weakly. "Are you?"

"Yes—and here's our train now!" as the electric megaphone twanged out. "This way! I'll take your bag."

Appalled, she saw him pick it up, pick up his own and shove off through the crowd.

"*Wait!*" she called, in a panic. "Just a minute. I—"

Then she checked herself, too shamed to admit her outrageous fib.

THEY were aboard the train, and it was on its way before Sally had time to think.

"Well, now suppose we get acquainted," said her enterprising com-

panion when he had stowed their bags away and they were comfortably seated. "My name is Wilson—Bill Wilson. And yours?"

Abstractedly, her mind on other things, she told him.

His own mind, it was quite obvious, was intent on one thing only; the making of conversation.

To this end he told her rapidly of his past, present and future — all of which were rather exciting, since he was a young civil engineer from the West, who had been practically everywhere before he decided to settle down in New York and work for a firm whose specialty was building skyscrapers.

"And you, Miss Davis?" he inquired, having sketched his own life history. "In what way do you subtract the cost of living from the nation's wealth?"

"With a typewriter," she told him, noting uneasily that the train had stopped at Newark.

"Oh, I see, a steno! And who is the lucky boss?"

"No one you would know," pointedly.

"Probably not," unabashed. "And where do you live?"

"Jersey City."

"What address?"

"General delivery!"

"Good. I'll call on you there when we get back."

"That will be lovely. I'll look forward to seeing you among the other mails!"

"Oh—are there many?"

"Three a day."

"Good Lord! What chance would I have?"

Sally didn't answer. Not that the chit-chat wasn't amusing, but she wished she could get rid of this talkative young man for a minute, so she could slip off the train before it left Newark.

"Wouldn't you like to go and have a smoke?" she inquired sweetly, reaching for her bag. "I really must write a little note now, and—and I'm afraid you'll find me dull company till I get it finished. That is, if you haven't found me so already."

"I've found you enchanting company!" declared Bill, taking the hint and rising. "But I imagine I can forego the pleasure long enough for you to catch up on your correspondence. So scribble away, Miss Davis. See you later."

"Much later!" Sally thought to herself as she watched his broad shoulders recede down the aisle.

But, when he had scarcely disappeared into the smoking compartment—and before she could leap from her seat and rush from the train—suddenly, with a jolt, it started again.

In a perfect fidget now, Sally sat there, pretending to write.

Presently her predicament was complicated by the conductor's arrival.

"Ticket?" he said, pausing at her seat.

"I—have no ticket," she stammered. "What is the next stop, please?"

"Elizabeth," said the conductor, regarding her somewhat doubtfully.

"Then give me a ticket to—"

But she broke off right there as Bill came sauntering back up the aisle.

"Oh, haven't you a ticket?" he asked, joining them.

"No," said Sally, in a very small voice. "I—I forgot to get one."

"Elizabeth, miss, did you say?" queried the conductor.

"Elizabeth?" echoed Bill.

"No—Lake Forest!" desperately.

And Lake Forest it was, though it cost her much more than she could afford . . .

No doubt she could redeem the unused portion, Sally reflected when the conductor had gone and this broad-shouldered young Westerner was seated beside her again—for she was certainly going to get off at Elizabeth, even if she had to make an abject confession.

But it was really no distance at all from Newark to Elizabeth—and when they reached there, Bill was right in the midst of an awfully interesting story about his experiences while building a railroad over the Andes Mountains, so she stayed on.

And when they reached the next stop he was right in the midst of another, so again she stayed on . . .

Each time they came to a station, in fact, this adventuresome young man seemed to be right in the midst of a story more interesting than the last—or was it Bill, not his stories, who was so interesting?

At any rate she found herself an absorbed though guilty listener as they rode on toward the mountains.

AT last, as the sun was setting, the train reached Lake Forest.

"And I hope there'll be one back to-night!" thought Sally as they got off, together with a number of other passengers. "Otherwise—"

But one breath of the cool, balsamy air banished her anxiety for the moment. How good it was to be back again, if only for an hour or so!

The mountains were glorious in the sunset. Banners of gold and saffron arched over the west like rainbows, with their promise of fair weather ahead.

If only her vacation were really beginning now! What a joyous week it would be!

But no, instead she'd have to leave this all to-night—run away like a truant child, back to her hateful Jersey City boarding house. Yes, and back to Martin Hunt's office again, back to taking his dictation and avowals by turns.

And oh, she'd never see Bill any more after to-night, for she'd never let him know where to find her. And it would be just as well, for he'd never forgive her anyway for this silly fib of hers.

All these thoughts raced through Sally's mind as they walked down the platform toward the line of busses drawn up beside the station.

Their drivers stood beside them, calling out:

"Chadwick House!"

"Larchmont Inn!"

"Pine Cabin Lodge!"

"Cedar Halls!"

She saw Danny, driver of the Pine Cabin Lodge bus, and turned her head quickly—for that was where she'd stopped last week.

"Where shall we go?" asked Bill.

"I don't know," said Sally nervously.

"Oh, you haven't been here before, either? Well, how about the Pine Cabin Lodge? That sounds as good as any."

"No, I—I don't like that." For it would never do to go back there, not even for a minute. "It—sounds too cabinish."

"Well, then, how about the Larchmont Inn?"

The largest, most expensive place in Lake Forest!

"I—I suppose that will be all right," Sally faltered.

For what difference did it make,

since she wasn't even going to stay there overnight?

So to the Larchmont Inn they went.

BUT next morning Sally was still there, after sending off — with prayers — a telegram to Martin Hunt, saying she had been delayed and would be back Tuesday.

The reasons she was still there, principally, were two. One of them was Bill, of course. The other was the moon!

It had hung low over the mountains last night, a great, round, yellow harvest moon, and they had watched it first from the Inn veranda, between dances.

Then they had gone down a winding path to a little pagoda half hidden among trees—and it was there they'd had the best view of it, and the longest.

So that is why Sally was still at the Larchmont Inn next morning instead of in Martin Hunt's office . . .

She and Bill had renewed their acquaintance of the afternoon and evening at the breakfast table, luxuriously late, and now they were out hiking over one of the many charming woodland trails around Lake Forest.

He had produced from that huge bag of his some awfully natty tweeds, and she had charmed hers into yielding an appropriate little russet ensemble.

They walked along gayly, in a bright, sweet world of evergreens, touched here and there with the gaudy paintbrush of autumn on maple and oak.

Now they paused for a moment by a spring that leaped from a mossy rock, dived headlong into a foaming pool, then dashed on down to the lake with echoes of tinkling laughter.

"The Fountain of Youth!" declared Bill.

"Oh, then I must have a drink!" exclaimed Sally.

"You don't need it!"

"Well, I'll take it anyway," she insisted. "I may need it later."

"Then I'll drink, too—so we'll never be old."

He held her hand while she leaned and touched her red mouth to that magic ribbon of silver. Then he bent, swallowed frostily.

"I feel younger already," said Sally as they moved on. "Do my clothes fit me?"

"Perfectly!" admiring the way they clung to her willowy figure. "Do mine?"

"As though tailored!"

Which they were, she felt sure.

"I feel so young myself," said Bill, "that I suggest we climb a mountain, or a hill, at the very least."

Up the trail from the lake came a group of hikers—a group Sally recognized as friends she had met last week at Pine Cabin Lodge.

"A very good suggestion!" she agreed hastily, in a panic lest they see her and call out their surprised greetings. "Suppose we climb this hill right here?" indicating the one from which the spring had come tumbling.

"Okeh! All hills lead to heaven in this weather!"

SO they climbed the hill, which wasn't so terribly high, but offered a marvelous view when they reached the top.

And there, on a flat rock, they basked in the morning sunshine—monarchs for the moment of all they surveyed, which was three counties, at least, and maybe a couple of States.

"Aren't you afraid you'll get freckled?" asked Bill at length, solicitously.

"Don't care if I do!" said Sally, tossing her tawny head. "But if you're afraid you'll get sunburned—"

"Don't care if I do!" he mimicked, tossing his own head, which was dark and wavy.

So they sat there till it was quite time to return to the Inn for luncheon. With the result that Sally *did* get freckled, and *didn't* care, while Bill got a rich coat of red that deepened to mahogany by nightfall—and didn't care either, though he insisted the best treatment for it was to sit in the moonlight.

And since she couldn't let him suffer alone, Sally sat with him there in the little pagoda where they had sat the night before.

The moon was even rounder and yellower now, if possible, and so low and near that you could see every wrinkle in its kindly old face.

"What a break to have a moon like that for our vacation!" said Bill, regarding it with approval.

Our vacation!

"Yes, isn't it?" murmured Sally.

"And what a break to have a girl like you to enjoy it with!"

To which she replied nothing.

"Yes, and what a lucky break I dropped that bag on your toe yesterday! Otherwise—"

"Lucky you didn't break it, you mean!"

"Otherwise I might be at the Pine Cabin Lodge to-night—"

"Looking at the moon with some other girl!"

"And you might be—"

"Some place quite different!".

"Looking at the moon with some other fellow!"

Martin Hunt? Heaven forbid!

"Funny, how things work out," he went on. "Why don't you call me Bill?"

"Why should I, Bill?"

"Don't you know, Sally?"

She didn't answer. He took her hand.

"Well, just so you call me it. That's enough."

Silence again.

"Your sunburn?" she asked at length, smiling softly. "Does it hurt very much, Bill?"

"Not unbearably!"

So he held her hand and endured it, somehow.

WITH the result that next morning again, Sally was still at Larchmont Inn, after sending off—with more prayers—another telegram to Martin Hunt, saying she had been further delayed and would be back Wednesday.

And that morning was another of those gorgeous fall days, so they took another hike off over one of those charming woodland trails—and later they climbed another hill, sat basking in the sunshine.

And that afternoon Sally came down with another rash of freckles—while Bill's sunburn, which was just about turning to tan, flamed up again.

And that night it was necessary to resort to another moonlight treatment. Again she sat by his side, since she couldn't let him suffer alone—and again he held her hand and endured it, somehow.

Yes, and when she left her patient at last that night, this loyal nurse sent off—with still more prayers—still another telegram to Martin Hunt, saying she had been still further delayed and doubted now if she would be back before the end of the week.

But even the most Job-like worm will turn at length, if sufficiently provoked. Next morning, when Sally

came down to breakfast, she found awaiting her a crisp ten-word message to the effect that she could either come back at once or not at all.

When Bill joined her, she seemed rather pale, for all her freckles.

"Why, what's the matter, Sally?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," she replied.

And he didn't press the question further.

"Well, anyway, suppose we go for a hike?" he suggested, when she had managed to force down a little food at last. "Maybe we can find another hill somewhere, if we try!"

So she went out with him, for she hadn't decided yet what she was going to do—but he might just as well have been by himself as far as company was concerned, for she scarcely said a word, though she was thinking dictionaries full.

She was so abstracted, in fact, that she failed to notice a certain group of hikers coming from the opposite direction till one of them called:

"Why, Sally! How come? Thought you left Sunday?"

Looking up, dismayed, she saw that it was a group from Pine Cabin Lodge!

SALLY'S first impulse, in that fluttering moment, was flight. Her second was tears. But curbing them both, she faced her erstwhile friends with a smile.

"Why, I—I came back," she said.

"Well, isn't that jolly!" said one of the men.

Then, tremulously, she introduced Bill.

Followed a moment or two of chatter—about what she would never know—whereupon, to her numb relief the group moved on.

But if Sally ever had any doubt about the truth of the old saying that the worst was yet to come, she lost it now, as Bill faced her.

"Well, you've certainly handed me a fast line!" he exclaimed. "Just what's the idea, anyway?"

"Oh, you'll hate me when you know!" she sobbed.

But nevertheless she told him, right from the beginning—omitting nothing, except a few details about Martin Hunt's personal interest in her, and even showing him the telegram she had received that morning.

And Bill didn't seem so peeved any more when he had read it. In fact, a slow smile spread over his sunburned face.

"I can match that!" he said, handing her a telegram of his own. "Read this!"

She read it—and gasped.

It was from his firm, refusing him another week's vacation and informing him that he would be fired unless he returned to work at once. Furthermore, it was dated Monday.

"B-but I don't understand," said Sally, though she thought that perhaps she did.

"Don't you?" said Bill. "Well, *I* had a rotten time last week, too. Nothing but rain, rain, rain! So when you said you were going on your vacation, I decided I'd steal another week and join you, though I was also coming home from mine."

"But why?" she asked, tremulously. "*Why*, Bill?"

He caught her hands, both of them—suddenly, possessively.

"Oh, Sally—Sally dear! Don't you know? Don't you *really* know?"

And because she said nothing, though her wildly beating heart told her beyond all doubt, he rushed on:

"It was because I loved you, adored you, sweet! Now do you know? It was love at first sight, dear Sally! And who needs more than one look, when he sees the girl of his dreams?"

She didn't answer that, either, for she couldn't have spoken then to save her life.

"And do you love me, too, Sally?" she heard him whisper, as he drew her close.

That was something she could answer without speaking—so she answered it with her lips.

"And will you marry me, sweet?"

"But, Bill, dear!" finding her voice at last. "How on earth will we live? We're both practically out of jobs."

"We'll live on love!" he declared, bending fondly over that wistful, adorable little freckled face. "And if that isn't enough, I guess I'll be able to get another job somewhere. There are lots of jobs in the world—but only one girl like you, my Sally!"

And only one boy like Bill, was her thought, as she nestled happily in his arms.

Autumn Fires

OCTOBER lights her signal fire,
A flaming maple tree,
And waves a ruddy sumac torch
For all the world to see.

October brought me back to you
And with her mystic art
Has set a maple-crimson flame
Of love within my heart.

—*Rena S. Travais*

BETTY-LOU'S LOVE QUEST

The Picture on the Cover

PART V

The Rescue

BETTY-LOU went with the Beauties, after all, to have her picture taken. When the Right Person isn't there, and doesn't seem to care what you do, and the Wrong Person comes around and urges you to go ahead and have a good time—why, you go, that's all.

It was on the way back that the disaster happened. No one ever knew exactly what the trouble was, but the bus that was bringing them home ran off the causeway into the sea, and turned over. Perhaps the driver had been drinking the Beauties' health a bit too freely; perhaps he saw something ahead of him that he tried to avoid; perhaps the steering gear went wrong. Anyway, he could never remember afterward, and the girls didn't know. All they were conscious of was a sudden roar and creaking, a terrific jolt, a swaying sensation from side to side. They were caught and flung about like rag dolls, against the floor and roof and seats, and back again; there was the sound of splintering wood and shivering glass; people were crying and calling out; the whole world seemed falling, falling into space, falling endlessly. And it all happened so quickly that there wasn't even time to be afraid, before there came the great shock of collision, a splash, and darkness.

The touch of something wet against her cheek finally roused Betty-Lou. She was lying half in and half out of the water, and something heavy was across her breast, crushing her and pinning her down. The waves, lapping against her face, swirled now under, now over her, and caught at her loosened hair. There were calls and cries all about still; there were shouts of men and the sound of blows upon wood, but she could see nothing. The great bulk of the overturned bus above her blotted out the sky, and the broken seat that pressed her down made it impossible to move. Some one very near was making queer little fluttering moans, like a hurt dove, she thought, and presently, summoning all her strength, she spoke. "Who is it?" she asked. There was no answer, but the fluttering sound, which had ceased for an instant, began again. "*Who* is it?" she persisted, and repeated the question, fruitlessly, for a weary while.

A wave broke over her face, and she

tasted its salt on her lips. "It is the sea!" she thought, and for a moment she was glad, unreasoningly. Then as unreasoning a terror swept through her, and she shrieked, madly, wildly, before the darkness crept upon her and she forgot again.

This time, when she opened her eyes, voices very near were speaking words she could not understand.

"I tell you, she *is* alive," one said fiercely. "I heard her scream."

The words meant nothing, but that voice—that voice! "Oh, Don, don't go away—don't go away!" sobbed Betty-Lou, and the queer little moans began again.

"You see," the fierce voice said, but it was not fierce any more. A big, warm hand touched her bare shoulder, and the voice, with its new note of tenderness, added: "Don't be afraid, darling. We'll get you out all right." He spoke to the other man again. "I'm going into the water after her. Here, hold this." The next instant he was in the ocean, under the bus and at her side. All the time that other person, whoever she was, kept up her fluttering moans. Betty-Lou wished she wouldn't; they must have bothered him.

At first he tried, very gently, to dislodge her, but found it useless. "Come closer," he said to the other man. "Be ready to drag her free when I get this weight off her. I think I can do it alone."

She saw his face now for the first time, a face strained and set in an agony of determination. He put his great shoulders against the boards that lay upon her, and, for a minute, paused. "If I can lift it," he asked, "do you think you can move a very little way?"

"I'll try," she whispered.

"Right into the water—don't be afraid. I'll not let you fall. *Now!*"

He braced himself for a tremendous effort, and the weight was gone from her breast. She struggled a very little way, as he had said, and slid against him.

The other man pulled her out, and then Don was wrapping her in his coat and lifting her. "Tell me if I hurt too much," he said.

How could arms so gentle hurt any one? She laid her head against him in weakly satisfied content, then raised it suddenly. "There was some one else," she said. "I heard her make a silly crying sound."

He laughed as he began to carry her away—a laugh like a sob. "I guess it must have been you, honey," he told her, and she sank back again.

"How comfortable your shoulder is," she murmured, half asleep. "Oh, Don, don't, don't take it away again!"

He laughed once more, that deep, full laugh that still had a catch in it like a sob. "Never while you want it, Betty-Lou," he said. "It's going to be right where you are, from now on!"

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT: "LOVE'S RAINBOW." On the Cover of the September 6th Issue. ON SALE ON ALL NEWSSTANDS SEPTEMBER 3rd

See page 633 for cover offering

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

August 23—Not a good day. Avoid quarrels and disagreements with those of the opposite sex. Buying and selling also look poor, so delay.

August 24—Somewhat better. You may feel inclined to go too far in expressing your feelings and run into trouble that way. Don't do it.

August 25—Very unreliable for most people and distinctly adverse for some. A day when the wise person will lie low. Headstrong in the evening.

August 26—Another day when it would not be wise to try to go too fast. Let others worry and fret while you put off important things till later.

August 27—This looks considerably better. Social and domestic things should be improved for most people, if they will do their respective shares.

August 28—And another good day here. Money matters, relations with the opposite sex and all general conditions developing nicely. Do it now.

August 29—Just one of those bread-and-butter days when attempts to get off the beaten track end in stone walls or blind alleys.

August 30—Big, grand ideas are apt to appeal to us to-day. But they will not turn out the way we think, so we will hold back and not be sorry.

August 31—Social and emotional affairs hold the

center of the stage and they will put on a good show if we don't attempt definite conclusions.

September 1—Most of this day looks like average mine run, but the vibrations in the evening tend to threaten mistakes and accidents. Go slow.

September 2—Mentally active, but not reliable, to-day. New ideas appear to be preferable to patching up old ones. Good with the opposite sex.

September 3—Hold back on everything here, for things started to-day will lead to trouble and discomfort. Stay with plans previously decided on.

September 4—A good day for those who can control their tempers and think straight. The temptation is to misdirect the energies. Be careful.

September 5—Financially adverse. Yet there will probably be many temptations to spend or go in debt. Don't strain your credit. Go without.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Everywhere we go these days we hear them talking about psycho-analysis.

But, in the words of Kipling, "What do they understand?"

All the experts agree that the word "psycho" means the soul. But the minute they begin to explain what the soul is it is not so easy to find two of them who agree. "Analysis" means to divide up into the smallest possible parts. Hence, psycho-analysis means the study or science of dividing the soul into its smallest parts.

That is, it is the science of knowing all we can about the smallest parts of the soul by taking each separate part of it separately and learning all we can about it.

For instance, take the desire section of the soul. Study all the desires and wants of human beings. This portion of the study in itself is big enough to require the lifetime of the average student if he or she goes about it in the usual hit or miss way the scientists have of doing things. But they have discovered that we have three main desires: the desire for food, the desire for drink and the desire for a mate. Thousands of other, but smaller, desires are catalogued under these three headings. In the matter of drink there are the good desires for liquid nourishment and also the bad desires for liquid stimulants, liquor.

But we are here more concerned with the desire for a mate.

And here, too, we see the good and bad desires possible in each and every human being. Some want a mate for what they can get out of them in the way of work, money, amusement—the selfish type. This is one of the bad desires; and it is one that should never be followed up, for it always leads to difficulty, sorrow and loss. There are many other negative desires in connection with wanting a mate, such as the temporary type that tires of a definite person after a little while and then turns his or her affections toward another.

The ideal, however, is the desire for the one and only person who can make the life complete by the perfect give and take of true love and companionship, both the husband and wife doing their share in all ways. Naturally, we all would like to find just that person who will fill this big order, and that is what most people are doing—liking to find—when they get married.

Here is where we get away from psycho-analysis, for we need a predictive science. We need a knowledge and a method by which we can foretell what the soul conditions between two people will be after they have been living together for a while. This shows up the weakness of psycho-analysis, for it cannot anticipate what a certain person will be to-morrow or a year from now. Astrology is the only science that can estimate the effect of one person on another, telling in advance how and to what degree they will both change by the contacts of, for instance, married life.

Psycho-analysis is all right as far as it goes, telling the approximate state of the soul of a person at the time of observation; but astrology goes further, giving future information that is more valuable. And, at the same time, astrology includes everything to be found in psycho-analysis, for it can reveal the inner workings of the individual as well for the present as for the future. Psycho-analysis is merely a childish and groping way of learning again the secrets and laws of the ancients who gave us the influences of the planets on humanity. We, as a race, led by our scientists, are discovering what has been known all along by the wisest among us, for the knowledge of the ancients has never been refuted nor has it been lost. Psycho-analysts are coming to astrology, closer every day. The minute a student of psycho-analysis asks the question "What is behind this person's state? What is the cause?" it is immediately necessary to enter the field of astrology, for the cause is not physical and is not on this earth.

We may discuss this matter further at another time, if you are interested. Let me know if you like it. There is much to tell.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

Here we go again.

Service for those who want to know when they should decide the most important emotional

question known to mankind. The following information is the next best time for marriage, or decision in regard to it, in the life of the person whose initials and birthday is given. Don't think I have missed a time when it would be good to marry; I assure you I have worked out the next and nearest favorable opportunity in each case.

E. W. W., September 15, 1910—December, 1932.
M. F., March 7, 1899—September, 1930.
G. P., December 5, 1913—March, 1940.
E. S., June 5, 1911—February, 1938.
E. K., May 17, 1908—August, 1933.
L. C., March 17, 1917—April, 1939.
A. M. G., July 6, 1905—December, 1934.
B. H., April 25, 1912—June, 1940.
M. P., April 19, 1909—November, 1936.
M. F., May 12, 1893—December, 1932, or July, 1933.
S. P., August 12, 1912—February, 1936.
M. M., February 26, 1900—November, 1934.
N. M. H., December 24, 1902—August, 1932.
G. J. H., July 14, 1905—February, 1935.
V. M. H., December 22, 1909—August, 1932.
A. M. C., April 17, 1908—November, 1936.
M. C., February 18, 1913—December, 1938.
M. F. F., May 2, 1906—October, 1932.
E. DeL., February 23, 1910—October, 1934.
F. V. F., April 29, 1899—September, 1932.
T. S., April 24, 1914—December, 1936.
G. J. L. B., March 10, 1913—January, 1935.
M. F., November 27, 1907—November, 1935.
E. H., February 14, 1909—April or November, 1938.
H. L. K., February 21, 1888—October, 1934.
S. W., March, 18, 1907—July, 1931.
W. M., November 22, 1909—July, 1931.
J. S., May 20, 1909—September, 1933.
L. W., August 31, 1915—June, 1940.
K. F., January 14, 1906—March or November, 1937.
R. M. B., May 12, 1894—December, 1932.
D. M. G., April 24, 1910—August, 1932.
M. R. A., February 19, 1896—October, 1934.
J. B., January 28, 1912—January, 1938.
M. H., October 30, 1909—November, 1934.
I. E. F., July 15, 1913—February or October, 1935.
Mrs. M. L. B., April 15, 1882—April or November, 1936.
H. J., December 24, 1901—August, 1932.
E. R., April 24, 1906—August, 1932.
M. L. B., September 15, 1906—November or December, 1932.
L. B., July 29, 1906—August, 1931.

OCCUPATIONAL GUIDE

L. D., October 8, 1899, you're doing the right thing; see what you can do to add something literary to the artistic. K. A. E., February 13, 1913, fairly good for character parts; avoid older people, particularly men. E. N., March 15, 1903 (?), cannot answer without knowing what line of work; many lines are indicated for you. Mrs. G. H., March 2, 1899, the financial end of almost any business is good for you; ought to live and work near water.

R. D. B., February 9, 1885, little to be gained in an artistic or musical career; better try something mechanical and keep the other as a side line. A. G., April 14, 1910, no lasting success for you in the movies, but you can sell or demonstrate; you can do anything with your hands; eventually you can do something literary or in advertising. M. L. M., January 15, 1913, not a matter of talent with you in music—just couldn't find a market no matter how good you might become; try something closer to government or executive work. No use wasting time and money.

C. C., April 28, 1916, teaching is good, gym teaching is fair, but you could do better teaching an artistic line. J. S. J., June 20, 1912, analytical or selling; you are good in photography, chemistry or distribution. M. F. McQ., October 19, 1912 (?) looks like your voice is better for speaking than for singing; artistic lines not good for you; try transportation of some sort. J. B., January 2, 1914, what are you studying? I'm not a mind reader; but you ought to be in decorating or art work—avoid iron, steel and the products of fire.

SELECTED

Don't do that, Mrs. J. S., born August 3, 1870. It wouldn't work out any better than it did before. If you didn't like it then, what makes you think you would like it now?

Between now and next July, Mrs. W. R. B., born December 9, 1905, if ever. Sorry I can't tell you more.

"How soon will I find real happiness?" asks T. P., born July 13, 1903. As soon as you are able to make a picture in your own mind of just what that happiness would consist of, provided it was not selfish and wouldn't hurt any one else. That's a big assignment, but it is what you must do. It may take you longer than you think to learn what your happiness requires. Don't be like the girl who didn't know what she wanted and insisted upon having some one else give it to her.

So you can't see anything for to-morrow, Mrs. J. McN., born August 6, 1902. That's too bad. The trouble with you is that you are a waster

of your opportunities and of your assets. As far as you can see, nothing ever happens unless you make it happen; and when you can't think of anything to do to make to-morrow better you think it can't be done. Lucky for the rest of us that you aren't responsible for making the sun rise every morning! Put a little more faith in the Almighty and don't worry. Some people are so narrow-minded their ears rub together. Don't be that way.

Yes, you will have to work all your life, S. A. W., born January 19, 1877. Isn't that grand! I expect to be given the same privilege, too. You didn't hope to be a parasite, did you? There is no excuse for living if we don't work and work intelligently and well.

What do you want me to do, settle a bet or something? Are you really a spendthrift or just careless with money? Is that an argument between you Mrs. E. M. G., born May 28, 1902, and possibly your husband? Looks to me like it might be. In other words, you want to know if it is your fault or possibly whether or not you can help it if money doesn't stick to your fingers. Your Mercury and Neptune indicate you must learn much of the values of this world. It certainly will be your fault if you don't, with as excellent a mentality as you possess.

"Will I ever have enough money to have the things I want?" asks Mrs. C. F., born August 18, 1893. I don't think there is that much money in the world, unless you trim down your desires to some extent.

"Is a sickness indicated in 1832?" asks C. M. H., born April 25, 1858. Be more careful with your dates. I suppose you mean 2318, or 8321 or something. Maybe you mean 1932. Seems more logical. What have you been doing? Going to fortune tellers, I'll bet. I can't see any sickness then for you. Unless you worry yourself into it. You've just been through a worse period than 1932 will be for you.

Your health will improve when you correct your tendency to worry over trifles, Mrs. A. B. C., born February 22, 1904. After you have worried about a thing for a while, however, it is no longer a trifle and then you think it was something worth worrying about in the first place. That's the way you fool yourself. Doesn't look sensible, does it? Then why not quit and enjoy part of the rest of your life?

Nursing isn't so good for you, E. G., March 25, 1914; artistic, business or banking lines appear more favorable.

They will be better when you can get out of your own light, A. S., August 3, 1904; part of your trouble is emotional—don't mix it with your work.

Not so good for a year or so, Mrs. M. H., December 28, 1899, although you have already seen the worst of conditions for many years. Hang on.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after Sept. 6. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

"IN an endeavor to analyze my own handwriting," writes Emma B., from Eugene, Oregon, "from your very interesting 'Analyze Your Own Handwriting' section, I find that my 't' bars point in every conceivable way, no two being the same. How can you figure out a person like me?"

This is a very natural question, and one which no doubt arises in the minds of countless readers. I have always found the "t" bar in a person's handwriting to be a pretty correct indicator of moods. In Emma's case where the "t" bars "point in every conceivable way," as she puts it, it indicates a temperamental nature which is not two minutes the same way. One moment she is full of optimism, and another she is filled with despair.

As we grow older, most of us become more poised in mind and in temperament. When we get to the age of forty the flightiness which characterized our youthful days has all but disappeared, with the result that we are saner in thought and action. That's just the reason why the majority of sensible people make the same sort of "t" bar all through their script. When Emma, or any of my other readers whose "t" bars run hither and thither, get to my age there will be a striking similarity in script.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

keep me from attending
Marion
be so and if not how
Roy

(Miss Marion S., Oakland, Cal.) I'm not surprised at what you tell me regarding your frequent "tiffs" with your boy friend. The fact of the matter is, Marion, he is too good for such a temperamental girl as you evidently are. After you read this I would advise you to go to Roy and apologize for all the mean things you have said to the boy. It is not in my province in this magazine to patch up quarrels between lovers, as you want me to do, but I would like to tell you how unjust you are in thinking those unwomanly thoughts about your fiancé. To me Roy seems a steady-going sort of chap who is as honest as the day is long. He is a boy who is likely to make a name for himself in his profession. I grant you he has a quick temper, and is rather impatient when things don't go his way. He also talks quite a lot, and holds strong opinions. All these characteristics are only part of a healthy-minded young man, and nothing to be ashamed of. You, on the other hand, are as unstable as water. You don't know your own mind for five consecutive minutes. If the truth were told, you are spoiled, and require a good talking to. This may be all very unsatisfactory to you, Marion, but you asked me to give you my candid opinion of your sweetheart and yourself, and I have just carried out your instructions. As far as marriage is concerned, you are still a long way from being ready for that.

I should follow that w
Evelyn
and am told that my stories are very good
Benjamin

(Miss Evelyn H., Tulsa, Okla.) You are a typical American business girl. You have "go," pep, and optimism in abundance. How in the world you ever fell in love with Benjamin is a mystery to me. Not that you are a cold or heartless individual, but simply that you have so much individuality and self-dependence about you. You have a much different horizon than has Benjamin. He is more of the student who loves his books and his desk, while you are at your best in the busy world of commerce. Money matters will also be a "bone of contention" when you two get married. Your ideas of spending are entirely different, since you are thinking all the time in hundreds while Benjamin is calculating in cents. It is quite possible for you to be happy with a man like Benjamin, providing the latter gives in to everything you propose. Though he may object now and then, I'm sure he has not enough stamina in him to put you in your place. In other words, he will soon discover that you are the big boss, and as such he will have to abide by your dictation, otherwise there's going to be trouble in some little love-nest in Tulsa. If I were you, I would wait. You are not well matched.

a specimen of my hand
Fanny
show, if I may presume to
Jack

(Miss Fanny W., Woodstock, Ont.) You two young people are to get on in the field of matrimony. You have many things in common with each other, and as far as I can judge by your pen strokes, your opinions of men and things are pretty much the same. You are evidently

very affectionate and warm-hearted, while Jack, though a little more austere in his mannerisms, is just as ardent when the opportunity offers itself. If I were you, Fanny, I would guard against that sensitiveness which I see runs through your disposition. You are inclined to be "touchy" when you are criticized about something. Your propensity to talk is quite obvious to me as well as your desire to tell tales out of school. You are not very good at keeping secrets, which is something you ought to rectify as soon as possible. Your fiancé is just the opposite. He can be as close as a clam when he wants to be. I further observe that Jack has a greater sense of humor than you have. You get off the handle so easily, the poor boy won't have a chance to take any liberties with you when he wants a little fun, as every young fellow does at one time or another. Apart from these eccentricities, I am confident you will be very happy.

writing to see how it will compare with Susan
your for this opportunity to Walter

(Miss Susan P., Chester, Pa.) Your letter interested me very much, and let me tell you that your fears about Walter are groundless. You are inherently sensitive and let little things annoy you. You are too much given to dreaming dreams and seeing visions. All your "mountains" are mere mole-hills, and as to the question of your happiness when married to Walter, I would say it was a hundred to one chance that you *would* be happy. In my opinion, your sweetheart is forceful and at times brusque in his manner. Of course, as you say, he talks too much and is fond of telling all he knows—a bad mistake. As the old saying is, "empty kettles always make the most sound," and your Walter stands a big chance of being labeled an "empty kettle" by people who know better. To come to yourself, I would like to see in you a little more robustness of nature. Shyness is evidently one of your great drawbacks, and something which is bound to keep you in the background when you are Walter's wife. Assert yourself a little more; you are suffering from an inferiority complex which is stunting your whole womanhood. I see no reason why you two young folk should not be happy when married.

YOUR CAREER

that it is very hard

(Miss Julia P., Santa Monica, Cal.) A quick thinking mind such as yours ought to accomplish much in the world of commerce. You are of the stuff that makes outstanding women executives. I am quite convinced that you would be a great catch to some organization, such as a bank, whose clientele includes women depositors. Your suave, polite manner might be responsible for many new accounts. There are other organizations besides banking institutions that would be glad to have your services. As a floor manager in some large department store, for instance. Your diplomatic ways would act like oil on troubled waters, and quiet the nerves of the most irate customer. All the while I'm praising your good qualities, I am looking for your negative points. You must have some, but in this sample of handwriting before me none are apparent. From another angle, however, I discover that you are a very affectionate girl. You are very sentimental and inclined to be gullible. You are also rather impatient. You let small things annoy and upset you. Your temper is excellent, and your sense of justice refreshing. If I were an employer I would put you into a position of trust right away, since you have all the earmarks of a fine, straightforward, conscientious employee.

successful career

(Miss Marjory N. F., Halifax, N. S.) You seem to have an excessive amount of buoyancy in your make-up. You are not easily discouraged, and when difficulties do come your way, you have a habit of laughing them off. With so many admirable qualities your place is in the markets of the world where you can rub shoulders with your fellow men. In other words, your proper place is in the selling business. A nature like yours would be a treasure to some real estate corporation who is seeking the services of a live wire. I'm sure few prospects would slip from your fingers—especially if such prospects

were of the masculine gender! Your whole bearing is persuasive and extremely aggressive. Perhaps a little too much so at times. Cultivate the art of listening a little more. Remember other people have opinions as well as you. When you are describing something be careful not to paint with a broom, nor make all your geese swans. Lastly, confine all this fluency of talk to business hours. Don't drag it into your social or private life. Very few care to associate with chatterboxes, and that's what you may become if you are not careful. As a business woman, however, you should be a "wow."

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The coupon on my

(Miss Margaret C., Toronto, Ont.) You impress me as being rather materialistic and domineering in your manner. You like to have your own way, and then some. Your will power is equal to any man's, and your Bohemian ideas of living are rather accentuated. You seem to be the essence of generosity, but on the other hand this liberality is perhaps more of a curse than a blessing to you. Among your negative traits I see that you are a procrastinator. Putting off the evil day is one of your besetting sins. You are analytical in your thinking, and give great heed to the smallest details. You are also impatient, and cannot tolerate slow pokes around you. Sentimentally, you are far from being steadfast in your affections. You love changes in the matter of friends and lovers. Though you have several strong characteristics, they are apt to be neutralized by your equally strong weaknesses—so to speak!

of my hand write

(Miss Louise W., Brooklyn, N. Y.) You are an ambitious sort of girl with a disposition that is buoyant and energetic. Difficulties may come to you, but you will be always equal to them. You are not easily discouraged, and would seldom become pessimistic. I would say that you are extremely sympathetic, and never feel happier than when you are helping some less fortunate person than yourself. Of course I am not overlooking the fact that you have a few foibles like the rest of us. For example, you have an exceptionally strong will. In fact, you are persistent and obstinate at times. When you make up your mind to do something, no one on earth can dissuade you. It is all right to have an iron will, but take care it doesn't resolve itself into pig-iron. Despite the fact that you are inherently kind and gentle, you have some temper when things don't go your way. On such occasions you never give your opponent time to get a word in sidewise. You are a great talker when you are on your high-horse, I can assure you. A person with your culture and refinement ought to know better! Why don't you start in right away, and get the upper hand of yourself when those weak traits put in an appearance?

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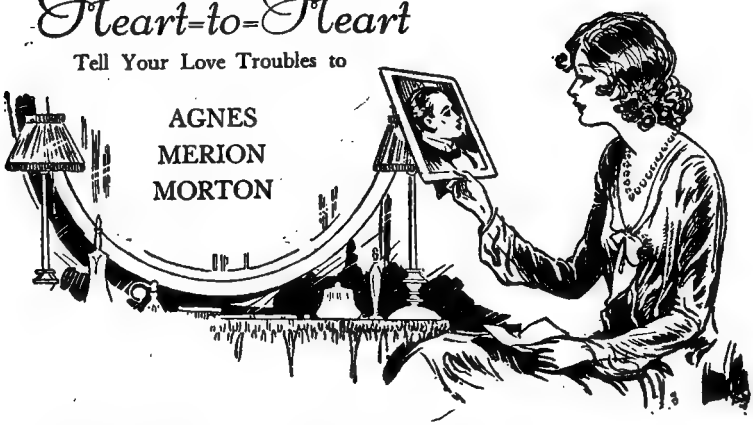

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have always thought a man an unspeakable cad to talk about his wife; besides, your sympathies seem usually with the woman, so I may get short shrift from you. But it looks to me as if my marriage is going on the rocks, and I don't want it to. So if an appeal to you can save us, or help us at all, I'm not going to withhold my story. Perhaps it's my fault and you can show me where I'm wrong and how to change.

We have been married less than a year. I'd racketed around the world ever since I was fourteen on my own, and I've always had an ideal of home, but I'm not a demonstrative man—my wife says I'm not affectionate. Maybe not, because I've had precious little affection showered on me—up to now. I fell in love with Tannie partly because she was so fresh and sweet, astonishingly innocent for a modern girl—unknowing. She always reminded me of that line in Kipling:

"They are pecked on the cheek and the nose
and the ear,
Who are lacking in lore."

She never got a kiss full on the mouth for weeks after we were engaged. It was pretty obvious that she'd never "been there before." She almost shrank from being made love to at first, but since we've been married that is all changed. She wants to be made love to all the time. I'm a fellow who likes to sit down with a book and a pipe and read for hours, but she won't let me alone to do it. As soon as the dishes are done she wants to come and sit in my lap and "pet." During our honeymoon it was all right, but it seems to me sometimes that I've had enough of it now to last a lifetime.

Mrs. Morton, *am* I wrong? If I put her off, ever so gently, she will cry and say she's going home to her mother, that I don't love her any more, that I've changed and there must be somebody else. Why, there's not another woman in the world I'd look twice at. I do love her, as much as I'm capable of loving anybody, at least. Shouldn't that be enough? Another thing: I'm tired when I get home and want to stay there, but she wants to go out, and if I don't take her there's a scene. I suppose I am to blame, partly at least, but I'm too old to change my whole nature.

You'll probably think all sorts of uncomplimentary things about me for writing like this. The one man friend I've spoken to about it—

and I haven't begun to tell him as much as I've told you—thinks I'm lucky. His wife has never met him at the door in her life, and she never wants to lallygag. She turns her cheek when he kisses her good-by in the mornings, even. Maybe he and I married the wrong women—and yet I can't see him married to Tannie, nor myself to his wife. I don't want an iceberg, either. Anyway, whatever you think of me, I hoped you might put your magic touch on what's wrong, or be able to see whether we've made a mistake we can't rectify. E. H. T.

My sympathies in this case, Mr. E. H. T., are with both of you. Perhaps, if "Tannie" had written me, I might help her more than I can help you, because she needs to do some adjusting as well as you do, and she is the active one in the tangle, so perhaps she needs to change more. But I do not believe you have made an irretrievable mistake. I am sure you can settle down together and be happy, later if not sooner.

In most marriages, the wise old people say, one loves and the other is loved, and your wife happens to be the one who does the loving. In a way, she will get more out of marriage than you do, for while she suffers more she also feels more, and gets more out of loving than you do out of being loved. To begin with the concrete thing of going out together. Can't you promise to take her out one night a week, at least? It is hard for a woman to be at home alone all day, and then have a husband who doesn't want to talk to her but merely to have her there while he buries himself in a book. Begin with that concession. Tell her you are too tired to go out often, but have some regular night for a movie or a show or a dance—whatever she wants, or is convenient.

Then about the excessive petting, you can make some adjustment, too. Compromise. Don't expect it to be all your way, and try to show her, as kindly as you can, that it can't be all hers. Say something like this: "Now get this straight. I love you, and there isn't another woman in the world I'd look at twice. But my nature is different from yours. I'm not given to—lallygagging, was it?—so much. I can love you without talking about it all the time. I want to make a success of this marriage, and while we love each other we can do it, but you'll have to help me, dear, and not be so exacting. I can't change my nature, and I don't want to change yours, but I do think we can get along without all this dissension. I'd like nothing better than to have you sit down here by me and read, too—this story is a pippin—try it."

You see, just at present she is only a part of your world, but you are all hers. You'll have to make up to her in some way for having offered yourself as her world. Try to get her to join a club or a gymnasium, so that she'll have another interest in life besides you. That's what I'd tell her, if she had written to me—part of what I'd tell her. It is a mistake, too, to make you so sure of her, but that's the way she's made. I must warn you not to kill her love for you by your coldness and unresponsiveness. Her feelings have never been spent on a man before; she has not wasted them on the unworthy, and you ought to appreciate that, instead of letting it disgust you. Don't drive her to look for love outside her home, for you will bitterly regret her if you lose her. I'm sure it will all come out right if you *both* make concessions. And by the time she has a child or two there will be something else for her to lavish her affection upon, and maybe—such is the perversity of human nature—you will be jealous when you see them getting it!

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of nineteen and I need advice. I have been going with a boy for two years, and now we are engaged. Of late my future mother-in-law seems to have changed very much toward me. Recently there was a girl come to live with her, and she has been going with the boys in town—first one and then another thinks she likes him best. She has even gone with my fiancé and I believe she really likes him best of all. She is a cute girl and I can't blame the boys for falling for her, but do you think, Mrs. Morton, she should try to get my fiancé away from me when she knows all about it?

The other night I brought the subject up when he was here, and he said, "Yes, I do like her a little, but no one can ever take your place." When he takes me over there she tries to be nicer to him than I am, and it hurts me terribly. Of course I know he has to be nice to her, but he takes her out quite a lot and never tells me about it, and I think that is going too far. Before she came his sister, her boy friend, he and I used to have little foursome parties, but now she is the one to make the fourth. His mother constantly throws them together and he seems to be changing toward me. It looks as if she is taking my place with all my in-laws, and even my lover's heart.

Please tell me what I can do to win him back, because I love him more than life.

CORA LOUISE.

I am sorry that this experience has come to you, and that you have to worry and be sad at a time which should be the happiest of a girl's life. But, dear, I want you to look at it this way. If a man cannot be true to you before marriage it would be only a question of time how long he would be true afterward, and it is better for you to split up now than it would be to have to divorce him after you had lived together, and when you had a baby or two, perhaps. A broken engagement is hard to live through, but a broken marriage is a thousand times worse.

Now, that is looking on the worst side, and believing that things are going wrong, when they

may not go wrong at all. Your fiancé is thrown with this girl so intimately that he can hardly help going about with her, and he may say nothing to you about taking her out through a mistaken idea of not worrying you. But if you will continue to be your best, sweet self, not to be exacting and possessive with him, not to be cross with him when he comes to see you, but friendly and kind as always, you may win through yet. So very often a girl, feeling she is losing a man, shows him her very worst side, and actually drives him away.

I want you to act toward him just as if everything is all right, to ignore the other girl's attempts to poach on your preserves, to be friendly toward her, too, hard as it may be, and not to let *any one* know that you are unhappy. Don't give them the satisfaction of bothering you. Pretend that you see nothing. Trust him, and let him feel that you do. Because in the end, whatever happens, you will be better off. If she is to "get him away," then you will have the pride of knowing that you were dignified about it, and he will be left in doubt about whether you were hurt or not. And if you win, he will be proud of you and your faith. Trusting him may keep him true; whereas jealousy and suspicion, natural as they are, may actually lose him to you because they breed resentment in the man who feels them working against him.

Cora Louise, there was never a truer word spoken than "She who steals thy husband's heart steals trash." The same thing goes for a fiancé. If she *can* get him away, he is not worth getting. And some day, if the worst does happen—or what you now believe would be the worst—you will realize that, and you will eventually find some one who can be faithful, can be true. I believe and hope it will all come right yet, and the only thing you can do to help is to sit tight and keep your self-control. I have heard many a woman nag and scold at her husband because he does not stay home with her enough—as if making his time at home disagreeable would make him want to stay there! Take a tip from those women about how *not* to act, and make your fiancé's time with you just as pleasant as you know how to make it. Keep on being the girl he fell in love with—not that other girl who has been driven to desperation by her jealousy. Showing jealousy, whether you have cause or not, will never do you any good. It just makes a man think you would not be an easy person to live with. For if you are unreasonable, as he would call it, now, what sort of wife would you be? Don't give him a chance to think of that, Cora Louise!

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been reading your answers to problems, so thought I'd write you mine. Maybe you can help me, and I will surely more than appreciate it. My husband and I have been married two years and a half. We always got along terribly, because he drinks and has been in jail several times since we've been married—in fact, he's there now, bound over to the grand jury. A year after we were married he stole a radiator off a car and was arrested for it and got thirty days. He promised me he would go straight and would not do anything like that any more, and would be good to me and all that, but when he got out he cursed me and beat me and ran with women—I know it to be a fact. And he said I never did anything to get him out, when I went and talked and cried and begged and stood the humiliation of the police judge, and did that four times, till after seventeen days I got him out, and he still ran with bad company. Now he is in jail charged with robbing a box car and breaking the seals of packages, and I am trying to get a bail bond because I don't know anything else to do.

I don't love him, because he has lied to me and treated me so cruelly, and is jealous. I don't know whether he is guilty of this charge or not. He says not, but he has lied to me so often that I never can believe he is telling the truth. I used to be a big strong girl; now I am a weak, nervous woman, and look delicate and sickly, with big circles under my eyes. I weigh less than ninety pounds and am five feet seven, so you can tell what I look like. I am not yet seventeen. Please try to help me.

DISTRACTED.

Distracted, I cannot help you unless you will help yourself by making up your mind to get away from this man and build your life anew without him. It is always best to try to save a marriage if one can, but it must be a marriage between two human beings, and they must both be willing to work for its success. When one of the parties to the contract is worse than a dumb beast would be, there is no chance of saving it.

Go to a lawyer now, while this man you call your husband is where he cannot harm you, and tell him the story. The laws in your State are particularly lenient, even if you have no proof of his infidelities, and you can get a divorce easily. You are still only a child in years; it is frightful to think you have had to live through such an experience, but not so frightful as to think you may feel you have to continue living like that. He will put you in your grave if you do not leave him. There is no way to appeal to such a man, nothing in him to appeal to; the only thing anybody could tell you to do is to go away as quickly and as far as possible. Perhaps, if you have learned sympathy for other women who suffer; if you have learned to be a better judge of men; if you can go out in the world now and be brave and strong, and true to your best self—live a decent, self-supporting life—it will not be all a loss. Of course you don't love him, you poor child. To speak of loving such a man is a profanation of that sacred word. Then what earthly reason is there for doing any-

thing but putting him out of your life? Go back to your own people, if you can; get a job, anyway, live in such a way that you can hold up your head with the best of them; and thank God that you have no children to complicate your problem. Happiness will come to you yet, if you deserve it.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I've read your section in ALL-STORY for some time with great interest. Perhaps you can help me solve my problem.

I'm twenty-two years old, earning a fairly good salary as cashier in a hotel, not the flapper type, although I'm modern in every respect. I have been proposed to by a business man several years older, who is deeply in love with me. He has told me so time and again and given me many presents so costly I did not want to keep them. He promises that he'll always love me, be good to me, and give me all I want. He's not a millionaire by any means, but is getting along fine in his store.

I am not in love with him. I like him better than any other man I know, but don't miss him when he is away, nor feel like putting myself out for him when he is here. He has no bad habits, but there are ways about his personality that don't appeal to me. Furthermore, he is very tall, and I am very short. We look funny together. Also, he is not good-looking. My folks like him and he likes them, but of course it is up to me.

This is my first proposal, as I've never been a man-chaser, although I have loads of friends and plenty of dates. He claims that I can become accustomed to him and overlook these little things, but I don't know. What do you think?

LITTLE GIRL.

I'm afraid that it would be very unwise, not to say foolish, for you to marry a man just because you have the chance to do so. No matter how good he is, and how well off, if you do not love him you would not be happy. You are too young a girl to despair of finding the Real Thing yet a while. If you were ten years older, and had been in love—got it out of your system, so to speak—I might advise you to marry for the sake of a good home, a fairly congenial companion, and an assured position. But this is not the case.

The fact of your relative heights need not enter into your decision. Tall girls almost always are liked by short men, and little girls by tall men. Neither do his looks matter in the least. When you love a man you don't care if he looks like the ace of spades. But the "ways about his personality" which you don't like are more serious. Those ways, which are simply not pleasing now, might grow on your nerves so that you couldn't bear to be with him. Marriage often brings out a good many "ways about" our loved ones' personalities that are sorely trying, and it takes a lot of loving to overlook them.

No, don't marry yet a while for any but the one good reason—that you feel with all your heart and soul that you cannot be happy without a certain person. Suppose that, after you married this man, some one else came along who could make you feel the way the girls in the stories do. That wouldn't be very much fun for any of you, would it? The man who now wants you may be disappointed if you refuse him, but it is nothing to the torture he would go through if he had to see his wife falling in love with another man, and suffering over it.

Wait a while, Little Girl, and I'm sure you'll have a happy story to tell us some day when the Right One comes along.

Do readers remember the sailor who wrote to complain that nice girls will not go with him because of his profession? Some of his answers are printed here, and although they may not give him much comfort, they explain the girls' attitude:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I've just finished reading "A Lonesome Seaman's" letter and would like to say a few words to him. Lonesome, I'm going to give you my viewpoint on this question. "Give a dog a bad name and it sticks with him." I guess you know sailors haven't such good names. If a girl is seen on the street with a sailor she is considered not so good. I'm not saying that every girl is not so good, but that is how it appears to other people.

I was in a seaport town not long ago and I didn't see the sailors going out with good girls. In fact, you know yourself that when a ship comes in all the sailors rush in one certain direction—well, I won't say all.

But, as you said, when you have known the girl all your life, went to school together and then she refuses to be seen with you—that's a different story. I wouldn't waste my time on a girl like that. I wish I could make this clearer, but as you notice from my letter I'm not so hot at writing 'em.

FLO FROM ALABAM.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have no question to ask, but will you print this so that "A Lonesome Seaman" can read it?

I have lived on the Lakes and now live on the Gulf, and know many sailors, both gobs and ordinaries. I have always wanted to sail, as a sailor, not passenger, but since I'm a girl that is hardly possible. Many people have told me that I should not have anything to do with sailors of any kind. They all seem to have bad reputations. But I always have to get to know the boy before I pass judgment, and in that way I've found many of the worst boys, the hardest-rapped sailors, to be only happy-go-lucky, fun-loving boys.

One reason a girl will shun a sailor is because of the hard rep all sailors have. But she is not much of a girl to go entirely by what others say. She should find out for herself whether

a sailor is a tough or a gentleman. I am not so old as this letter may sound, but I have my ways and ideas. Me for the sailor!

HAP OF TEXAS.

DEAR LONESOME SEAMAN:

It's hard to say it, but I think that the attitude of the girls you speak of is mostly the fault of sailors in general. I used to live in New York, and the man I was engaged to was in the Navy. When his ship came in he would come to see me, of course, and then when I went out with him every one seemed to think we were pick-ups. Other men in uniform would turn around and stare at us, and call out all sorts of embarrassing things—such as, "Go to it, Jack!" and "Hello, cutie, have you a sister at home?" and "You certainly know how to do the pickin', Jack," etc., etc. I endured it because I loved him, and I stared down all the fat old ladies exercising their dogs on the Drive —such snooty looks as I got from them you'd never believe. Yes, I lived through it, but I'm not sure I'd want my little girl, when she grows up, to have to go through the same thing.

We're married now and Chub (his name isn't "Jack") is second mate, and hopes for another promotion soon. He is all that could be desired in a man or a husband, and there are others like him in the Navy, but not so very many out of a thousand. Most of them have a girl—and the wrong sort of girl—in every port, and that is why the ones who are straight get classed in a bunch with the ones that aren't.

SAILOR'S MATE.

This subject has not been thrashed out thoroughly yet. The opinions of others will be welcome.

La Verne—If this boy thinks so little of you, and trusts you so little that he will not take your word instead of your "friend's" (why call such a person a friend, incidentally?—enemy rather!), let him go, and be glad you know in time just where you stand with him. There are plenty of others who will appreciate you, and you will find one some day if you don't disfigure your face with the lines that come from crying, and warp your mind by letting it dwell on this one fickle person. I'm afraid he took what he was told just as an excuse, La Verne. He would have been a most uncomfortable sort of husband.

Jim Crow—If you really want to know what the girl thinks about marrying you, the quickest and best way is to ask her. It sounds to me as if you have been taking too much for granted, and perhaps the young lady got tired of it. Girls are not mind readers, you know, and your actions may have puzzled her as much as hers are now puzzling you.

Friend in Need, W. Va.—Your letter and the answer will be printed in the next issue. There were too many ahead of you and I have not space to treat the problem properly here.

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If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am interested in making tons of pen pals. I am five feet two, have blond wavy hair, blue eyes, and am fifteen. Some folks say I'm the very old Nick himself for playing tricks. Love all sports and I'm an artist, too. Would like some Western pen pals, but anything will do; everybody write. All you lonely pals, cheer up! I'll help you. Call me HAPPY KANSAS.

Just around the corner
I'll be mailing a letter to—you?
Doesn't matter who you are,
Lou, Sal, or Sue.
I'm a peppy girl in my twenties,
Want pen pals a-plenty,
Five feet three, in stocking feet,
Write snappy letters, hard to beat.
Have brown hair, eyes the same—
Come on, girls—are you game?
Now I won't tell you any more,
Ah, you must find out—?
Simply write to the
SHY LITTLE MOUSE.

I am in a T. B. San, where I have to stay six months or more. Please don't think I am a wreck. I look very healthy as I have only a slight case, but it's so very lonely away from my home and family. I have a curly-headed girl of four and a sonny boy of thirteen months. Have been married for six years, but am only twenty-three. Have brown hair and eyes, five feet two, weigh 103. Won't some one write and pass away some lonely hours for me? LONESOME OF MASS.

I am five feet seven, weigh 140, have light brown hair and eyes. I had two years in high and am now working as an OFFICE GIRL.

I am a young modern girl, full of fun, and love to have a good time. I have plenty of friends and would like to have many more. I am seventeen, and would like to correspond with anybody far or near. BABE OF NEWARK.

Here I am again, only this time I'm writing for my friend. She is just like me, full of fun and a good sport. She is too ill to write the letter, and can't sit up. I will sign her name as
HONEY OF NEWARK.

Would you do me the favor of printing a little plea for my sister and myself, as we're both very lonely at times? We're just two old pals who

love each other dearly and would like to hear from every one. My sis's name is Eva; she has brown wavy hair, big brown eyes, age seventeen. I, Sammy, am nineteen, brown eyes and hair. We are lovers of all sports.

SAMMY AND LITTLE EVA.

I'm a lonely boy who would like to make some friends in your club. I'm eighteen, five feet eleven, have light wavy hair and green eyes, and weigh 150. I play the violin and guitar, and sing quite well. I like all kinds of sports, skiing being the best.

LLOYD OF CANADA.

May I join your club? I would like to hear from others who are lonesome, blue or happy. I'm a girl of twenty-three, brown ha.. and eyes, weigh 95. I'm very fond of reading, and surely enjoy the ALL-STORY stories.

BIRDIE OF TENNESSEE.

I am twenty-three, five feet seven, fair complexion, but rather dark now as the result of twenty-nine months in the tropics. Not as good-looking as some of those people in your department, but not bad. Have been in the United States Marine Corps for nine years, and have three years more to serve. Am an aviator and have been in three expeditions in various countries. I'm an expert flier, and have 1,000 miles to my name, but am in the hospital now as the result of a crash from the height of 7,500 feet. But I'm nearly well and would be glad to hear from people seventeen to twenty-four.

LONESOME MARINE.

I would like to hear from pals between fourteen and seventeen. I am fourteen, weigh about 98, and am about five feet five. I love swimming, hiking, playing ball and especially dancing. Come on, be friends with

FLO, A MINNESOTA GAL.

Please do publish this letter as I am very anxious to hear from some lonesome friends. I am light complexioned. I've been attending college this last year. I am nearly nineteen, weigh 140, height five feet seven and a half. Considered rather popular and very lucky, having traveled several times to Europe. I am interested along athletic and musical lines, dance fairly well—not hard to look at. I would like to have some popular, sincere pen pals, interested along the same lines and about the same age, light complexion. Will gladly exchange snapshots. C'mon, let's hear from you—don't delay—get your pens ready and I'll answer. Here's to success of the Lonesome Club!

ALEX THE PITTSBURGHER.

I am seventeen years young, passable on looks, and am very tall. I have always lived in town until this spring we moved to the country, and I get awfully lonesome at times. I like sports, music, movies, and so on, but best of all I like to receive letters. Please everybody write and all letters will be answered promptly by

MOONLIGHT OF NORTH CAROLINA.

As I am very anxious to get some pen pals in America, I will be very glad if you will help me. I am twenty-one and am fond of all kinds of sport, specially shooting, riding and fishing. I have been on several shooting trips to the Bushveldt, so I will have plenty of exciting experiences to relate to any one who wishes to write to me. In anticipation,

CECIL OF JOHANNESBURG.

I would just love to have some pen pals. Here is my mental picture: five feet two, beautiful wavy locks, hazel eyes, olive complexion and a happy disposition. I am twenty-two. I live in an old seaport so should you care to write I can give you some good yarns from

ALICE IN WONDERLAND.

Wanted—Extra postman to carry the letters I hope to receive. Now don't disappoint me, pen pals. I'm most nineteen, blond hair and curly, guaranteed to last six months. Fond of dancing and sports. I have blue eyes and fair complexion which doesn't run when wet. For more information write to

BLONDY FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE.

First of all I want to tell you what I do. I am a dancer, taught dancing for one year, then went on the stage. For two years I danced in a musical comedy, and at present am learning some new steps and am starting rehearsing for a new show. I am twenty, with blond hair and blue eyes, weigh 135. Anxious to make more friends, and think this Lonesome Club a peach of an idea to get them. So come on, fellows; believe me, I have some exciting experiences to tell you about the show business.

AL THE DANCER.

I have a great many friends, but they are all away up in the north of Scotland, so that down in the south I feel so lonely sometimes. I do not fly around to dances as most girls of this generation do, but would far rather sit and read or have a good round of golf. I am nineteen, have wavy blond hair and blue eyes. Good coloring, but not the "straight up and down" figure—just a good many curves. I am about five feet three, but dare not mention how many pounds I weigh. I have a hobby—breeding Angora rabbits. I just love the open air and do not care for large cities. Now I wonder if any one feels as if they would like to write me. I do hope some one will have pity on me and help to cheer a lonely soul. I am awfully shy and do not like to force my company on people here.

FRANCES OF SCOTLAND.

To future pen pals (I hope): I am eighteen, blond-haired, green-eyed and freckled—not pigeon-toed, though. I love to read history and novels and the loves of more fortunate American girls

in ALL-STORY. Love to dance, to eat, in fact, the world in general. Am suffering from acute illusions of beauty, but believe firmly in them—not my personal beauty, but all-round beauty in everything. Please write, and will certainly answer, as "Lonely in Beautiful Hawaii" says, "if it takes till midnight"

ME FROM HERE.
Wonder Where?

I am writing you in hope of getting some pen pals. I am a cripple, and can play the violin. Please, girls, get busy and write to a cripple. I am sixteen years old and have brown hair. I would like to have mail from anywhere.

CATHERINE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

I'm a girl of sixteen with brown hair and eyes, fair complexion, and five feet two high. I like to write letters and will be glad to exchange snaps. I like to dance, swim and ride—also play the uke. I am a senior in high school.

DUCKY.

I'm a lonely girl because I haven't any pen pals. All my friends live near me. I am seventeen, five feet three, weigh about 102, have dark brown hair and large brown eyes, and am not bad-looking. I love to hike, read, dance, attend movies, travel and swim. I promise quick answers to all who write to

A LONELY WEST VIRGINIAN.

Will ya? Here goes—I'm not lonely, not at all. I'm sixteen, brown hair and eyes. Please don't think me conceited, but truly I am quite good looking as people tell me, and am popular. I gained my popularity by being a toe and acrobatic dancer. I just love to dance—have taken lessons for years. Hear my S O S for more friends for

HONEY OF MASSACHUSETTS.

No one could be more interested in writing and reading letters than I. Can you find room in your club for me, too? I am seventeen, slim, black eyes and hair, five feet three, and passable in looks. I love hunting, riding, fishing, swimming, tennis and basketball. My chief weakness is boating. I have a canoe of my own.

LONESOME LOU.

I am just sixteen and would like very much to hear from girls all over the United States and foreign countries, or any place, so long as I can keep my pen busy. I promise to answer all letters as soon as they are received.

LONESOME GOLDIE OF MAINE.

I'd like to hear from everybody who is lonesome like me. I am eighteen with big brown eyes and dark hair. I live in a city that is noted for its educational institutions, such as Harvard, Tech, and Radcliffe.

LITTLE MARY FROM CAMBRIDGE.

Gangway, everybody! Here I come, but don't get frightened and run away because I'm only an ordinary brown-haired girl with blue eyes, just sweet sixteen and full of pep. I'm not hard to look at, I understand. Snap into it, girls. I'm just raring to go. Will exchange snaps.

JUST ME, CANADA.

Room for one more member? I am so lonesome for a pen pal! I am small, have light brown hair, big blue eyes and a fair complexion. I am thirteen. I'm interested in sports, especially swimming. Well, here's hoping to hear from some one soon.

MAXINE OF COLORADO.

May I come in? I'm twenty-three, five feet four, dark hair and blue-gray eyes, dark complexion but not too dark. I love all outdoor sports, especially dancing in the open, although I don't get to go out often. Hurry, girls, young and old, write to me soon as I'll promise to answer all.

PAULINE OF MISSOURI.

I am a girl sixteen with dark long curly hair, brown eyes, and weigh 120. My three favorite sports are dancing, tennis and swimming. I would like to have some pen pals all over the country.

SALLY OF WAUKEGAN.

I'd like pals between fifteen and twenty-one. I am five feet nine, brown eyes and black hair, and am considered fairly good-looking. No, I'm not conceited. I enjoy dancing, swimming, motoring and singing. I'd rather sing than eat, even when I'm really hungry. I'd like to write to those who are interested in music particularly, because I write songs for a pastime.

TEDDY OF INDIANA.

I'm twenty, have light tan hair and dark brown eyes. Five feet six and a half. I lived for two years in New York and enjoyed every minute, also worked as stenographer in an engineering office. Am back home in a town not so small, but sometimes get lonely for some new pals. I am considered good-looking (I love me) and nothing would make me happier than hearing from those around my age or a little older.

BOB OF NEW YORK.

I am a girl five feet four, have blond hair and blue eyes, considered quite good-looking. I am sixteen and adore dancing and swimming. I am very peppy and a regular jazz hound.

FRITZIE.

It pays to advertise, they say, so I'm going to advertise for pen pals. Don't you ever feel blue and lonesome as if you needed a real pen pal—one who would be tender when things are gray and rejoice when they are bright? Try me—I'm true blue. I am nineteen, of Jewish faith, five feet two, dark blue eyes, brown bobbed wavy hair, light complexion, considered good-looking. I'm a high school graduate and in such a position that I come in contact with people in all walks of life; college, professional, business and the working class.

I'll be greatly pleased to hear from every one who reads this. I have a sweet disposition, quite romantic at times; otherwise a little serious mixed with humor. I am neither modern nor old-fashioned. I do not smoke nor drink, but

play bridge, swim, hike and play tennis, and I can also cook an eatable meal. I readily enjoy a good show, a book, and, of course, writing letters. I live near New York and can tell quite a bit about it. I'll be waiting patiently now for the mailman to bring heaps of letters to

JEAN OF JERSEY.

I'm a girl just sixteen and would like to make loads of friends by mail. I have light brown hair and blue eyes, am five feet five and a junior in high school. I like swimming, baseball and football. I want a lot of new friends, so hurry, all you nice girls, and write to me. I'm not lonesome, but wanna share my fun.

LOUISE FROM ALABAMA.

I love friends and receiving letters. I am sixteen, five feet five, athletic build, brown hair and green eyes. I'm interested in all sports, especially baseball, swimming and horseback riding. I have just moved to a strange place and haven't many friends. BABE OF NEW YORK.

I am just twenty-one, bred and born in Australia. I have led my life on the cattle station of this country, which I must admit is very, very dull at times, but then again not so hard on us as it is on those that come from the cities to try to lead this life. They never stay too long, any of them, only those that are reared to the country. I follow up horse-breaking myself; it is a free and easy life, and a good living. I have neither troubles nor worries and can always smile.

It seems hard to think our lives are so free when I see some of the letters written to Mrs. Morton by those that are so unhappy. I could not help writing this letter, although I am so far away, to ask you if you could get me some one to correspond with. Perhaps if some of those unhappy ones had some one to write to out here they would not be so downhearted. Hoping to hear. A LONELY AUSTRALIAN.

Whew! I'm out of breath trying to tell the whole world that I crave pen pals by the mail boxful. I am five feet three short, changeable-colored eyes, auburn curly hair (long, or I should say getting there), weigh 116 light, and was eighteen in July. I just love to read, write, play golf and tennis, swim, and am simply crazy about music and the motion picture colony. I will answer all letters received, and don't forget to send a snap because I like to exchange pictures. I work in a ballroom and it's very interesting. I'll tell you all about it when you write. I have worked for four and a half years, most of this time in show business. My girl friend and I are Apache Specialty Dancers, and also both write songs. We are going to travel soon, and look out—we may call on you. I would especially like to hear from all those who are interested in what I am, and I include the newspaper game, too. So hoist your pens, all you loyal pen pals, and don't forget THE SONG AND DANCE KID.

I am a girl of sixteen, have black curly hair and large brown eyes. I am five feet in height, and my favorite sports are dancing and swimming and joy riding—if you know what I mean. I was elected the most popular girl in our high school, yet I long to know and write to pals away from home. I will answer any one's letter and will send my photo to the first five writing me. Oh, well, why describe myself further? But understand, I want those in the so-called fast and modern set to write to me. Here's hoping you'll open up your hearts and give me the pleasure of answering some snappy letters. I like the men—the strong sex—but I'll even welcome man haters. Just try me. WHOOPEE OF TEXAS.

A happy thought just came to me! My greatest dream has always been to visit the far corners of the world, as well as all the crevices of the United States, but my workaday desk keeps me tacked very nicely in little old New York. Perhaps through your column all these crevices can come to me by letter. I should like to hear from twenty-year-old girls from the Sunny South and Golden West or anywhere at all where I have managed to strike a spark of friendliness.

ROAMIN' HEART.

Hello, kids! I wish you'd write to me. I'm thirteen, in junior high, five feet four, blond, blue-eyed, slightly pugged nose, and lonesome for pen pals. Anxious to exchange snapshots, 103 in weight. Please write to JO OF ILLINOIS.

I am five feet three, dark curly hair, dark eyes, and weigh 104. I am fifteen years old, love sports, and love to read. I want any one from anywhere to write to DOODLE OF MISSOURI.

We are two lonesome girls eighteen years of age. Our former home was near Cheyenne, Montana. We are working in a restaurant in a town in Iowa, and we want loads of letters to answer in the evening as it's tiresome doing nothing. We are both blondes, big blue eyes, and very fair complexions, one five feet two and the other five feet one in height. We promise to answer all letters received immediately. LOVE AND ROMANCE.

We are twin sisters, Billie and Neda, fifteen years old and very lonesome. Won't some one write to us? Although we are twins we differ in every respect. I, Neda, have brown wavy hair, dark green eyes, and am fond of swimming, dancing, tennis and such sports. Billie, who is sitting right here, is trying to describe herself. Here goes: jet-black hair, black eyes, and a good sense of humor. Loves horseback riding and all exciting sports. We are looking for excitement and promise to answer all pen pals.

BILLIE ANE NEDA.

I am a girl of sixteen who craves pen pals. I have red hair, brown eyes, am five feet two and weigh 122. I am a senior in high school, and will answer all letters I receive.

JACKIE OF DELAWARE.

Aw, gee, why do I have to be so lonely and blue? Because I haven't any pen pals! Well, let's see if I can't be cheered up a bit. I'm fourteen,

five feet four, and weigh 101. I have a pretty good sun-tan complexion, brown eyes and coal-black hair, and am sometimes considered real cute. I adore swimming, hiking, fishing, boat riding, visiting and school athletics, and most of all the good ole Florida sunshine. I am very fond of writing, so come on, find out more about Florida and its crackers and sports. I promise with both my heart and gizzard to do my best in the matter of letters and snapshots.

BELLE OF FLORIDA.

I am twenty-four, white, fair complexion, five feet six, weigh 140. I am an Observer and also a mechanic in the Air Corps. Would like to hear from any one interested in aviation. I like to swim, hunt, fish and play ball, and am a good all-round athlete. I also like good shows, books and a few magazines, of which ALL-STORY is best. Any one who would like to hear about airplanes, jungles, South Sea life, here is a good chance. JIM OF PANAMA.

Dear Mrs. Dale: Amongst your mail
You find my earnest plea.
I'd like to find a pen friend kind
Who'd gladly write to me.

Five four I go, weigh one-two-o.
My hazel eyes are grave;
I'm debonair, with bronze-gold hair
Which needs no marcel wave.

I have a lot, I bob it not,
No shingle has it seen.
My friends do oft say, "Oh, how soft
It is, and what a sheen."

My looks, alas, are not first-class—
No movie star, 'tis true.
My photograph may cause a laugh—
I'd like a photo, too.

No poet I, I merely try
To tell my thoughts in rhyme.
So, U. S. A., do write, I pray,
To Austral's sunny clime.

My verse, I fear, would cause a tear
To any poet true.
I know it's bad, whereat I'm sad;
I'd like a pen friend who

Is fond of fun, enjoys a pun,
Or writes a verse at times,
Or some one smart at sketching art
Who'd illustrate my rhymes.

Yours excitedly,
A HOPEFUL AUSTRALIAN.

P. S. I guess that my address
Will double postage claim.
My letters hence demand threepence;
Replies will need the same.

I hope you'll secure many nice friends for me around my own age. I am nineteen, have brown wavy hair, hazel eyes, and am five feet four. A person once told me that I looked like an angel—as for that, you can find out for yourself. Am interested in all sports, and can I dance? Oh, no! Come on, everybody. I'll answer all letters and promise to make them interesting.

DOTTY DIMPLES.

Just another girl—almost sixteen. Medium height and weight, brown eyes and hair. It seems to be the custom here to tell what you like to do. I'll say that above everything else I like to receive letters from any one and every one, all ages and from all places and countries.

KENTUCKY GIRL.

Will I join your club?—and how! I want to have lots of new friends everywhere, for I like to hear from college boys. I want plenty of mail, for I am so lonesome. I am a soldier in the United States Army, am just nineteen, have brown hair and eyes, five feet seven, weight 150. Come on, boys, and write. Who will be the first?

SOLDIER JOE.

I'm one of them thar red-headed gals, but don't let that scare you folks away. I weigh 124, am five feet three, have blue eyes and, of course, you can tell by the curly auburn hair that I am Irish. I love to write and receive letters, so come on, work my mailman overtime. Oh, yes, I'm free, white and twenty-one

IRISH OF CALIFORNIA.

I am a girl of eighteen, have brown hair and eyes and am five feet in height. I play the piano, love swimming and rowing. I would like to write to any one within the ages of eighteen to eighty. Far or near, write one, write all.

LITTLE BROOKLYN GIRL.

I am a young man of twenty-two, with a pleasing personality, five feet eight, dark curly hair and brown eyes, and fair complexion. Have a keen eye for dancing and a good time. Will exchange photos and continue interesting correspondence with all who write.

BROWN EYES OF IRWIN.

I would like very much to hear from some readers of ALL-STORY. I am twenty-three, five feet six, brown hair, blue eyes. I have so much time to write, and would love to.

DOT FROM ILLINOIS.

I think your club's just great and I love ALL-STORY. I am twenty-four and married, and I have three darling little girls, three, two and one. You see, I can't go out as I have no one to mind my little ones for me, so pen pals would sure cheer me up. I'd like pals from Bermuda, England, Scotland; West Indies, and Japan, and last, but not least, lots from the good old U. S. A. I traveled lots before I was married, in the countries named above. Well, to the pal that lives farthest away I will send a pretty gift. Pals to be, you can write to me about anything. I love to sew, cook, read, write, and do all kinds of fancy work. PATSY OF NEW JERSEY.

Just Peachy of Tuscaloosa, what is your name and address?

I am a graduate nurse, twenty-two years of age, married and have a lovely daughter not quite a year old, and a wonderful husband. But I find I am quite lonely out here in California, as I've

been living here only a few months. I am interested in dancing and horseback riding, and am sure I can write some interesting letters if I am lucky enough to find some pen pals.

AN R. N. FROM NEW YORK.

I have read your ad in ALL-STORY about making friends through letter writing. I am lonely and alone and have lots of spare time, so I could write and would be glad to make friends in this way. Please try to get somebody to write to me and I will answer every letter I get. I am twenty years old, and single.

BETTY OF MILWAUKEE.

A friend of mine has passed me a copy of ALL-STORY and I have become much intrigued with your attractive columns. I am a middle-aged British widower of moderate means and leisure, with Bohemian tastes and perhaps an exaggerated sense of humor. If any of your friends are contemplating a trip to this side of the Atlantic, it would give me pleasure to advise them and, if possible, facilitate their sightseeing. If any of the members of the Lonesome Club care to drop me a line I shall be delighted to furnish them with any information which may interest them.

HERBERT FROM WHITEHALL.

Boots of Virginia, Lonely Blondy of Connecticut, and *Glad of Minnesota,* you did not send me your correct names and addresses, so how can I get correspondents for you? Please, everybody, do not blame Mrs. Dale if your letter is not printed within a reasonable time, because so very often letters come in signed only with a pen name, and you forget to let me know who you are. Real names are never printed in the magazine, but naturally I have to know them in order to reach you. Look at your letter again before you send it. HAVE YOU SIGNED YOUR OWN NAME AND ADDRESS?

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Cherry .....

The Kiss That Awakened.....

Love's Race With Death.....

The Strangest Heritage .....

Smarty Girl .....

Tangled Threads .....

The Prince in Waiting.....

Vacation Blues .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(*Name and address may be omitted, if desired*)